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Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards

by Algernon Charles Swinburne

April, 2000 [Etext #2137]

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ROSAMUND, QUEEN OF THE LOMBARDS
A TRAGEDY

by Algernon Charles Swinburne

PERSONS REPRESENTED

ALBOVINE, King of the Lombards.
ALMACHILDES, a young Lombard warrior.
NARSETES, an old leader and counsellor.

ROSAMUND, Queen of the Lombards
HILDEGARD, a noble Lombard maiden.

SCENE, VERONA
Time, June 573

ACT I

A hall in the Palace: a curtain drawn midway across it.

Enter ALBOVINE and NARSETES.

ALBOVINE.

This is no matter of the wars: in war
Thy king, old friend, is less than king of thine,
And comrade less than follower. Hast thou loved
Ever--loved woman, not as chance may love,
But as thou hast loved thy sword or friend--or me?
Thou hast shewn me love more stout of heart than death.
Death quailed before thee when thou gav'st me life,
Borne down in battle.

NARSETES.

Woman? As I love
Flowers in their season. A rose is but a rose.

ALBOVINE.

Dost thou know rose from thistle or bindweed? Man,
Speak as our north wind speaks, if harsh and hard -
Truth.

NARSETES.

White I know from red, and dark from bright,
And milk from blood in hawthorn-flowers: but not
Woman from woman.

ALBOVINE.

How should God our Lord,
Except his eye see further than his world?
For women ever make themselves anew,
Meseems, to match and mock the maker. Friend,
If ever I were friend of thine in fight,
Speak, and I bid thee not speak truth: I know
Thy tongue knows nought but truth or silence.

NARSETES.

Is it
A king's or friend's part, king, to bid his friend
Speak what he knows not? Speak then thou, that I
May find thy will and answer it.

ALBOVINE.

I am fain
And loth to tell thee how it wrings my heart
That now this hard-eyed heavy southern sun
Hath wrought its will upon us all a year

And yet I know not if my wife be mine.

NARSETES.

Thy meanest man at arms had known ere dawn
Blinked on his bridal birthday.

ALBOVINE.

Did I bid thee
Mock, and forget me for thy friend--I say not,
King? Is thy heart so light and lean a thing,
So loose in faith and faint in love? I bade thee
Stand to me, help me, hold my hand in thine
And give my heart back answer. This it is,
Old friend and fool, that gnaws my life in twain -
The worm that writhes and feeds about my heart -
The devil and God are crying in either ear
One murderous word for ever, night and day,
Dark day and deadly night and deadly day,
Can she love thee who slewest her father? I
Love her.

NARSETES.

Thy wife should love thee as thy sire's
Loved him. Thou art worth a woman--heart for heart.

ALBOVINE.

My sire's wife loved him? Hers he had not slain.
Would God I might but die and burn in hell
And know my love had loved me!

NARSETES.

Is thy name
Babe? Sweet are babes as flowers that wed the sun,
But man may be not born a babe again,
And less than man may woman. Rosamund
Stands radiant now in royal pride of place
As wife of thine and queen of Lombards--not
Cunimund's daughter. Hadst thou slain her sire
Shamefully, shame were thine to have sought her hand
And shame were hers to love thee: but he died
Manfully, by thy mightier hand than his
Manfully mastered. War, born blind as fire,
Fed not as fire upon her: many a maid
As royal dies disrobed of all but shame
And even to death burnt up for shame's sake: she
Lives, by thy grace, imperial.

ALBOVINE.

He or I,
Her lord or sire, which hath most part in her,
This hour shall try between us.

Enter ROSAMUND.

ROSAMUND.

Royal lord,
Thy wedded handmaid craves of thee a grace.

ALBOVINE.

My sovereign bids her bondman what she will.

ROSAMUND.

I bid thee mock me not: I may ask thee
Aught, and be heard of any save my lord.

ALBOVINE.

Go, friend. [Exit NARSETES.]
Speak now. Say first what ails thee?

ROSAMUND.

Me?

ALBOVINE.

Thy voice was honey-hearted music, sweet
As wine and glad as clarions: not in battle
Might man have more of joy than I to hear it
And feel delight dance in my heart and laugh
Too loud for hearing save its own. Thou rose,
Why did God give thee more than all thy kin
Whose pride is perfume only and colour, this?
Music? No rose but mine sings, and the birds
Hush all their hearts to hearken. Dost thou hear not
How heavy sounds her note now?

ROSAMUND.

Sire, not I.
But sire I should not call thee.

ALBOVINE.

Surely, no.
I bade thee speak: I did not bid thee sing:
Thou canst not speak and sing not.

ROSAMUND.

Albovine,
I had at heart a simple thing to crave
And thought not on thy flatteries--as I think not
Now. Knowest thou not my handmaid Hildegard
Free-born, a noble maiden?

ALBOVINE.

And a fair
As ever shone like sundawn on the snows.

ROSAMUND.

I had at heart to plead for her with thee.

ALBOVINE.

Plead? hast thou found her noble maidenhood
Ignobly turned unmaidenlike? I may not
Lightly believe it.

ROSAMUND.

Believe it not at all.
Wouldst thou think shame of me--lightly? She loves
As might a maid whose kin were northern gods
The fairest-faced of warriors Lombard born,
Thine Almachildes.

ALBOVINE.

If he loves not her,
More fool is he than warrior even, though war
Have wakened laughter in his eyes, and left
His golden hair fresh gilded, when his hand
Had won the crown that clasps a boy's brows close
With first-born sign of battle.

ROSAMUND.

No such fool
May live in such a warrior; if he love not
Some loveliness not hers. No face as bright
Crowned with so fair a Mayflower crown of praise
Lacked ever yet love, if its eyes were set
With all their soul to loveward.

ALBOVINE.

Ay?

ROSAMUND.

I know not
A man so fair of face. I like him well.
And well he hath served and loves thee.

ALBOVINE.

Ay? The boy
Seems winsome then with women.

ROSAMUND.

Hildegard
Hath hearkened when he spake of love--it may be,
Lightly.

ALBOVINE.

To her shall no man lightly speak.
Thy maiden and our natural kin is she.
Wilt thou speak with him--lightly?

ROSAMUND.

If thou wilt,
Gladly.

ALBOVINE.

The boy shall wait upon thy will. [Exit.]

ROSAMUND.

My heart is heavier than this heat that weighs
With all the weight of June on us. I know not
Why. And the feast is close on us. I would
This night were now to-morrow morn. I know not
Why.

Enter ALMACHILDES.

Ah! What would you?

ALMACHILDES.

Queen, our lord the king
Bade me before thee hither.

ROSAMUND.

Truth: I know it.

Thou art loved and honoured of our lord the king.
Dost thou, whom honour loves before thy time,
Love?

ALMACHILDES

Ay: thy noble handmaid, Hildegard.
I know not if she love me.

ROSAMUND.

Thou shalt know.
But this thou knowest: I may not give thee her.

ALMACHILDES.

I would not take her from the Lord God's hand
If hers were given against her will to mine.

ROSAMUND.

A man said that: a manfuller than men
Who grip the loveless hands of prisoners. Well
It must be with the bride whose happier hand
Lies fond and fast in thine. Our Hildegard,
Being free and noble as Albovine and we,
Born one with us in race and blood, and thence
Our equal in our sole nobility,
Must well be won by noble works, and love
Whose light is one with honour's.

ALMACHILDES.

Queen, may I
Perchance not win it? I know not.

ROSAMUND.

Nay, nor I.
Soon may we know; they are entering toward the feast.
[The curtain drawn discovers a banquet, with guests assembled:
among them NARSETES and HILDEGARD.

Re-enter ALBOVINE.

ALBOVINE.

Thine hand: I hold the whitest in the world.
Sit thou, boy, there, beside sweet Hildegard.

[They sit.

Bring me the cup. Queen, thou shalt pledge with me

A health to all this kingdom and its weal
Even from the bowl that here to hold in hand
Assures me lord of Lombardy and thine
By right and might of battle and of God -
The skull that was thy father's: so shalt thou
Drink to me with thy father.

ROSAMUND.

Sire, my lord,
The life my sire, who gave thee up his life,
Gave me, and fostered till thou hadst given him death,
Is all now thine. Thy will be done. I drink
To thee, who art all this kingdom and its weal,
All health and honour that of right should be,
With all good things I wish thee. [Drinks.

ALBOVINE.

Wish me well,
And God must give me what thou wilt. Good friends,
My warriors and my brethren, hath not he
Given me to wife the best one born of man
And loveliest, and most loving? Silent, sirs?
Wherefore?

ROSAMUND.

Thou shouldst not ask it. Bid the cup
Go blithely round.

ALBOVINE.

By Christ and Thor, it shall.
What ails the boy there? Almachildes!

ALMACHILDES.

King,
Nought ails me.

ALBOVINE.

Nor thy maiden?

ALMACHILDES.

King, nor her.

ALBOVINE.

Fall then to feasting. Bear the cup away.
Some savour of the dust of death comes from it.

Sweet, be not wroth nor sad.

ROSAMUND.

I am blithe and fain,
Sire; and I loved thee never more than now.

ALBOVINE.

Nor ever I thee. Now I find thee mine,
And now no daughter of mine enemy's.

ROSAMUND.

No.
Thou hast no enemy left on earth alive -
No soul unslain that hates thee.

ALBOVINE.

That were much.
What man may say it? and least of all may kings.

ROSAMUND.

What hast thou done that man should hate thee--man
Or woman?

ALBOVINE.

Which of us may answer, Nought?

ROSAMUND.

Thou might'st have made me--me, my father's child -
Harlot and slave: thou hast made me wife and queen.

ALBOVINE.

Thee have I loved; ay, and myself in thee,
Who hast made me more than king and lord, being thine.

ROSAMUND.

Courtesy sets on kings a goldener crown
That sits upon them seemlier.

ALBOVINE.

Courtesy!
Truth. Hark thee, boy, and let thy Hildegard
Hearken. Is she, thy queen, a peer of mine?

ALMACHILDES.

She wears no crown but heaven's about her head -
No gold that was not born upon her brows
Transfigures or disfigures them. She is not
A peer of thine.

ROSAMUND.

He answers well.

ALBOVINE.

He answers
Ill--as the spirit of shamelessness might speak.

ALMACHILDES.

Shameless are they that lie. I lie not.

ALBOVINE.

Boy,
Tempt not the rod.

ALMACHILDES.

The rod that man may wield
No man may fear: the slave who fears it is not
Man.

ALBOVINE.

Art thou crazed with wine?

ALMACHILDES.

Am I thy king?

ALBOVINE.

My thrall thou knowest thou art not, or thy tongue
Durst challenge not mine anger.

ROSAMUND.

Thrall and free,
Woman and man, yea, queen and king, are born
More wide apart than earth or hell and heaven.
Sirs, let no wrangling breath distune the peace
That shines and glows about us, and discerns
A banquet from a battle. Thou, my lord,
Hast bidden away the dust of death which fell

Between us at thy bidding, and is now
Nothing--a dream blown out at waking. Thou,
My lord's young chosen of warriors, be not wroth,
Albeit thy wrath be noble, though my lord
See fit to try my love as gold is tried
By fire: it burns not thee. Strike hand in hand:
Ye have done so after battle.

ALBOVINE.

Drink again.
I pledge thee, boy.

ALMACHILDES.

I pledge thee, king.

ROSAMUND.

My lord,
I am weary at heart, and fain would sleep. Forgive me
That I can sit no more.

ALBOVINE.

What ails thee?

ROSAMUND.

Nought.
The hot and heavy time of year has bound
About my brows a band of iron. Sire,
Thou wouldst not see me sink aswoon, and mar
The raptures of thy revel.

ALBOVINE.

Get thee hence.
Go. God be with thee.

ROSAMUND.

God abide with thee.
[Exit with attendants.

ALBOVINE.

This is no feast: I will no more of it. Boy,
Take note, and tempt not so thy bride, albeit
She tempt thee to the trial.

ALMACHILDES.

I shall not, king,

ALBOVINE.

She will not. Sirs, good night--if night may be
Good. Hardly may the day be, here. And yet
For you it may be--Hildegard and thee.
God give you joy.

ALMACHILDES.

God give thee comfort, king.
[Exeunt.

ACT II

A room in the Queen's apartments.

Enter ROSAMUND.

ROSAMUND.

I am yet alive to question if I live
And wonder what may ever bid me die.
But live I will, being yet not dead with thee,
Father. Thou knowest in Paradise my heart.
I feel thy kisses breathing on my lips,
Whereto the dead cold relic of thy face
Was pressed at bidding of thy slayer last night,
And yet they were not withered: nay, they are red
As blood is--blood but newly spilt--not thine.
How good thou wast and sweet of spirit--how dear,
Father! None lives that knew thee now save one,
And none loves me but thou nor thee but I,
That was till yesternight thy daughter: now
That very name is tainted, and my tongue
Tastes poison as I speak it. There is nought
Left in the range and record of the world
For me that is not poisoned: even my heart
Is all envenomed in me. Death is life,
Or priesthood lies that swears it: then I give
The man my husband and thy homicide
Life, if I slay him--the life he gave thee.

Enter HILDEGARD.

Girl,
I sent for thee, I think: stand near me. Child,
Thou art fairer than thou knowest, I doubt: thou art fair

As the awless maidenhood of morning: truth
Should live upon thy lips, though truth were dead
On all men's tongues and women's born save thine.
Dawn lies not when it laughs on us. Thy queen
I am not now: thy friend I would be. Tell
Thy friend if love sleep or awake in thee
Toward any man. Thou art silent. Tell me this,
Dost thou not think, where thought scarce knows itself -
Think in the subtle sense too deep for thought -
That Almachildes loves thee?

HILDEGARD.

More than I
Love Almachildes.

ROSAMUND.

Thus a maid should speak.
Dost thou love me?

HILDEGARD.

Thou knowest it, queen.

ROSAMUND.

It lies
Now in thy power to show me more of love
Than ever yet hath man or woman. Swear,
If thou dost love me, thou wilt show it.

HILDEGARD.

I swear.

ROSAMUND.

By all our fathers' great forsaken gods
Who smiled on all their battles, and by him
Who clomb or crept or leapt upon their throne
And signed us Christian, swear it, then.

HILDEGARD.

I swear.

ROSAMUND.

What if I bid thee give thyself to shame -
Yield up thy soul and body--play such parts
As shameless fame records of women crowned
Imperial in the tale of lust and Rome?

HILDEGARD.

Thou couldst not bid me do it.

ROSAMUND.

Thou hast sworn.

HILDEGARD.

I have sworn.

Queen, I would do it, and die.

ROSAMUND.

Thou shalt not. Yet

This must thou do, and live. Thou shalt not be
Shamed. Thou shalt bid thine Almachildes come
And speak with thee by nightfall. Say, the queen
Will give not up the maiden so beloved
- And truth it is, I love thee--willingly
To the arms of one her husband loves: but were it
Shame, utter shame, that he should wed not her,
The shamefast queen could choose not. Then shall he
Plead. Then shalt thou turn gentler than the snow
That softens at the strong sun's kiss, and yield.
But needs must night be close about your love
And darkness whet your kisses. Light were death.
Hast thou no heart to guess now? Fear not then.
Not thou but I must put on shame. I lack
A hand for mine to grasp and strike with. His
I have chosen.

HILDEGARD.

I see but as by lightning. Queen,
What should I do but warn the king--or him?

ROSAMUND.

Thou hast sworn. I hold thee by thy word.

HILDEGARD.

My Christ,
Help me!

ROSAMUND.

No God can break thine oath in twain
And leave thee less than perjured. Thou must bid him
Make thee to-night his bride.

HILDEGARD.

I could not say it.

ROSAMUND.

Thou shalt, or God shall smite thee down to hell.
What, art thou godless?

HILDEGARD.

Art not thou?

ROSAMUND.

Not I.
I find him just and gracious, girl: he gives me
My right by might set fast on thine and thee.

HILDEGARD.

For love of mercy, queen--for honour's sake,
Bid me not shame myself before a man -
The man I love--who gives me back at least
Honour, if love he gives not.

ROSAMUND.

Ay, my maid?
And yet he loves thee, or thy maiden thought
Errs with no gracious error, more than thou
Him?

HILDEGARD.

Art thou woman born, to cast me back
My maiden shame for shame upon my face?
I would not say I loved him more than man
Loved ever woman since the light of love
Lit them alive together. Let us be.

ROSAMUND.

I will not. Mine are both by God's own gift.
I will not cast it from me. Ye may live
Hereafter happy: never now shall I.

HILDEGARD.

Have mercy. Nay, I cannot do it. And thou,
Albeit thine heart be hot with hate as hell,
Couldst say not, nor fold round with fairer speech,

Those foul three words the Egyptian woman said
Who tempted and could tempt not Joseph.

ROSAMUND.

No.
He would not hearken. Joseph loved not her
More than thine Almachildes me. But thou
Shalt. Now no more may I debate with thee.
Go.

HILDEGARD.

God requite thee!

ROSAMUND.

That shall he and I,
Not thou, make proof of. If I plead with him,
I crave of God but wrong's requital. Go.

[Exit HILDEGARD.

And yet, God help me! Can I do it? God's will
May no man thwart, or leave his righteousness
Baffled. I would not say, 'My will be done,'
Were God's will not for righteousness as mine,
If right be righteous, wrong be wrong, must be.
How else may God work wrong's requital? I
Must be or none may be his minister.
And yet what righteousness is his to cast
Athwart my way toward right this wrong to me,
A sin against the soul and honour? Why
Must this vile word of YET cross all my thought
Always, a drifting doom or doubt that still
Strikes up and floats against my purpose? God,
Help me to know it! This weapon chosen of me,
This Almachildes, were his face not fair,
Were not his fame bright--were his aspect foul,
His name dishonourable, his line through life
A loathing and a spitting-stock for scorn,
Could I do this? Am I then even as they
Who queened it once in Rome's abhorrent face
An empress each, and each by right of sin
Prostitute? All the life I have lived or loved
Hath been, if snows or seas or wellsprings be,
Pure as the spirit of love toward heaven is--chaste
As children's eyes or mothers'. Though I sinned
As yet my soul hath sinned not, Albovine
Must bear, if God abhor unrighteousness,
The weight of penance heaviest laid on sin,
Shame. Not on me may shame be set, though hell
Take hold upon me dying. I would the deed

Were done, the wreak of wrath were wroken, and I
Dead.

Enter ALBOVINE.

ALBOVINE.

Art thou sick at heart to see me?

ROSAMUND.

No.

ALBOVINE.

Thou art sweet and wise as ever God hath made
Woman. I would not turn thine heart from me
Or set thy spirit against the sense of mine
For more than Rome's old empire.

ROSAMUND.

That, albeit
Thou wouldst, be sure thou canst not. God nor man
Could wake within me toward my lord the king
A new strange love or loathing. Fear not this.

ALBOVINE.

From thee can I fear nothing. Now I know
How high thy heart is, and how true to me.

ROSAMUND.

Thou knowest it now.

ALBOVINE.

I know not if I should
Repent me, or repent not, that I tried
A heart so high so sorely--proved so true.

ROSAMUND.

Do not repent. I would not have thee now
Repent.

ALBOVINE.

By Christ, if God forbade it not,
I would have said within mine own fool's heart,
Of all vile things that fool the soul of man
The vilest and the priestliest hath to name

Repentance. Could it blot one hour's work out,
A wise thing and a manful thing it were,
And profit were it none for priests to preach.
This will I tell thee: what last night befell
Rejoices not but irks me.

ROSAMUND.

Let it not
Rejoice nor irk thee. Vex thou not thy soul
With any thought thereon, if none may bid thee
Rejoice: and that were harsh and hard of heart.

ALBOVINE.

I will not. Queen and wife, hell durst not say
I do not love thee.

ROSAMUND.

Heaven has heard--and I.

ALBOVINE.

Forget then all this foolishness, and pray
God may forget it.

ROSAMUND.

God forgets as I. [Exit ALBOVINE.
And had repentance helped him? Shall I think
It might have molten in my burning heart
The thrice-retempered iron of resolve?
Yet well it is to know that penitence
Lies further from that frozen heart of his
Than mercy from the tiger's. Ay, God knows,
I had scorned him too had penitence bowed him down
Before me: now I do but hate. I am not
Abased as wholly, so supremely shamed,
As though I had wedded one as hard as he
Who yet might think to soften down with words
What hardly might be cleansed with tears of blood,
The monumental memory graven on steel
That burns the naked spirit of sense within me
Like the ardent sting of keen-edged ice, which makes
The naked flesh feel fire upon it.

Enter ALMACHILDES.

ALMACHILDES.

Queen,
I come to crave a word of thee.

ROSAMUND.

I hear.

ALMACHILDES.

Thou knowest I love thy noble Hildegard:
And rather would I give my soul to burn
Than wrong in thought her flawless maidenhood.
And now she hath told me what I dare not think
Truth. And I dare not think her lips may lie.

ROSAMUND.

I have heard. And what is this to me? She hath not
Said--hath not told thee, nor wouldst thou believe -
That I have breathed a lie upon her lips
Or taught them shamelessness by lesson?

ALMACHILDES.

No.
But she came forth from thee to me--from thee -
And spake with quivering mouth and quailing eyes
And face whose fire turned ashen, and again
Rekindling from that ashen agony
Flamed, what no heart could think to hear her speak,
Mine least of all, who love her.

ROSAMUND.

Ay?

ALMACHILDES.

Not she,
I know it as sure as night is known from day
And surelier than I know mine own soul's truth,
Spake what she spake in broken bursts of breath
Out of her own heart and its love for me.

ROSAMUND.

Didst thou so answer her?

ALMACHILDES.

I might not well
Answer at all.

ROSAMUND.

Poor maid, she hath loved amiss.
Belike she thought to find in thee a man's
Love.

ALMACHILDES.

That she hath found; nought meaner than a man's;
No wolfish lust of ravenous insolence
To soil and spoil her of her noblest name.

ROSAMUND.

I do not ask thee what she said. I know.

ALMACHILDES.

I knew thou didst.

ROSAMUND.

To make your bridal sure
She bade thee make thy bride of her to-night.

ALMACHILDES.

She bade me as a slave might bid the scourge
Fall.

ROSAMUND.

Such a scourge no slave might shrink from; nay,
No free-born woman, Almachildes.

ALMACHILDES.

Queen,
I crave thy queenly mercy though I say
My maid, my bride that will be, shrank, and showed
In all the rosebright anguish of her face
A shuddering shame that wrung my heart. And thou
Hast surely set thereon that seal of shame.
I know it as thou dost.

ROSAMUND.

Ay, and more she said,
Surely: she said I would not yield her up
To the arms of one my husband loves and holds
Honoured at heart--I hate my husband so,
She told thee--were the need avoidable
Save by her sacrifice to shame.

ALMACHILDES.

Thou knowest
All, as I knew, and lacked not from thy lips
Confession.

ROSAMUND.

Warrior though thou be, and boy
Though my lord call thee, brainless art thou not -
No sword with man's face carven on the heft
For mockery more than truth or help in fight.
I do not and I durst not play with thee.
Thy bride spake truth: I knew not she might need
So much of truth to tempt thee toward her. Now
Thou knowest, and I know. If this imminent night
Make not thy darkling bride of her, by day
Thy bride she may be never. She hath sworn.

ALMACHILDES.

Why wouldst thou shame her?

ROSAMUND.

Shamed she cannot be
If thou be found not shameless. Plead no more
Against thine own love's surety. Doubt thou not
I wish thee well, and love her. Make not thou
Out of her shamefast maidenhood and fear
A sword to cleave your happiness in twain.
What if some oath constrain me, sworn in haste,
Infrangible for shame's sake, sealed in heaven
Inevitable? Ask now no more of me.
Nightfall is here upon us. Nought on earth
May set the season of your bridal back
If thou be true as she must. Wait awhile
Here till a sign be sent thee--till a bell
Strike softly from this chamber here at hand.
I have sworn to her she shall not see thy face,
So sore she prayed she might not: and for thee
I swore that ere the darkling air grew grey
Thou shouldst arise and leave her, and behold
Thy midnight bride but when thou art bidden again
To meet her here to-morrow. Strange it were,
More strange than aught of all, that thou shouldst prove
Dishonourable: and except thou be, these things
Must all be wrought in this wise, lest her oath
And mine, at peril of her soul and life,
By passionate forgetfulness of thine
Disloyally be broken. Swear to us now
Thou wilt not break our oath and thine, or think
To look to-night upon thy bride.

ALMACHILDES.

I swear.

ROSAMUND.

I take thine oath. I bid not thee take heed
That I or thou or each of us at once,
Couldst thou play false, may die: I bid thee think
Thy bride will die, shamed. Swear me not again
She shall not: all our trust is set on thee.
What eyes and ears are keen about us here
Thou knowest not. Love, my love and thine for her,
Shall deafen and shall blind them. Be but thou
A bridegroom blind and dumb--speak soft as love,
And ask not answer louder than a sigh -
And when to-morrow sets thy bride and thee
Here face to face again, thy soul shall stand
Amazed: thy joy shall turn to wonder. This
Thy queen, whose power may seal her promise fast,
Swears for thine oath again to thee. Good night.
[Exit.

ALMACHILDES.

I cannot think I live. Our Sigurd loved not
Brynhild as I love her, and even this hour
Shall make us great as they. No spell to break,
No fire to pass, divides us. Blind and dumb,
Love knows, would I be ever while I live
For love's sake rather than forego the joy
That makes one godlike power of spirit and sense,
One godhead born of manhood. God requite
The queen who loves my love and cares for me
Thus! How may man or God requite her? Ah!

[Bell rings softly from without.

There sounds the note that opens heaven on me,
And how should man dare heaven? But love may dare. [Exit.

ACT III

An eastward room in the Palace.

Enter ALBOVINE.

ALBOVINE.

This sun--no sun like ours--burns out my soul.
I would, when June takes hold on us like fire,
The wind could waft and whirl us northward: here
The splendour and the sweetness of the world
Eat out all joy of life or manhood. Earth
Is here too hard on heaven--the Italian air
Too bright to breathe, as fire, its next of kin,
Too keen to handle. God, whoe'er God be,
Keep us from withering as the lords of Rome -
Slackening and sickening toward the imperious end
That wiped them out of empire! Yea, he shall.

Enter HILDEGARD.

HILDEGARD.

The queen would wait upon your majesty.

ALBOVINE.

Bid her come in. And tell her ere she come
I wait upon her will. [Exit HILDEGARD.]
What would she now?

Enter ROSAMUND.

By Christ, how fair thou art! I never saw thee
So like the sun in heaven: no rose on earth
Might think to match thee.

ROSAMUND.

All I am is thine.

ALBOVINE.

Mine? God might come from heaven to worship thee.
Thine eyes outlighten all the stars: thy face
Leaves earth no flower to worship.

ROSAMUND.

How should earth
Worship her children? Nought it is in me,
My lord's dear love it is, that makes me seem
Fair.

ALBOVINE.

How thou liest thou knowest not. Rosamund,
What hast thou done to be so beautiful?

ROSAMUND.

The sun has left thine eyes half blind.

ALBOVINE.

I dare not
Kiss thee, or stare straight-eyed against the sun.

ROSAMUND.

Kiss me. Who knows how long the lord of life
May spare us time for kissing? Life and love
Are less than change and death.

ALBOVINE.

What ghosts are they?
So sweet thou never wast to me before.
The woman that is God--the God that is
Woman--the sovereign of the soul of man,
Our fathers' Freia, Venus crowned in Rome,
Has lent my love her girdle; but her lips
Have robbed the red rose of its heart, and left
No glory for the flower beyond all flowers
To bid the spring be glad of.

ROSAMUND.

Summer and spring
May cleanse and heal the heart of man no more
Than winter may, or withering autumn. Sire,
Husband and lord, I have a woful word
To speak against a man beloved of thee,
A man well worth all glory man may give -
Against thine Almachildes.

ALBOVINE.

Has the boy
Transgressed again in awless heat of speech
And kindled wrath in thee against him--thee,
Who stood'st between my wrath and him?

ROSAMUND

I would
His were no more transgression than of speech.
He hath wronged--I bid thee ask of me no more -
A noble maiden. Till her shame be healed,
Her name is dead upon my lips and his,
Who is yet not all ignoble.

ALBOVINE.

He shall die
Except he wed her, and she will to wed.

ROSAMUND.

That surely will she.

ALBOVINE.

Bid him hither.

ROSAMUND.

See,
There strides he through the sunshine toward the shade.
How light and high he steps! He sees thee. Bid him -
Beckon him in.

ALBOVINE.

He knows mine eye. He comes.

ROSAMUND.

Obedient as a hound is.

ALBOVINE.

As a man
That knows the law of loyal manhood.

ROSAMUND.

Ay?
God send it be so.

Enter ALMACHILDES.

ALMACHILDES.

Queen and king, I am here.
What would you?

ALBOVINE.

Truth. Hast thou not borne thyself
Toward any soul on earth disloyally
Ever?

ALMACHILDES.

Never.

ALBOVINE.

I would not say thou liest.

ALMACHILDES.

Do not: the lie should burn thy lips up, king.

ALBOVINE.

Thou hast wrought no wrong toward man or woman?

ALMACHILDES.

None.

ALBOVINE.

Speak thou: thou hast heard him answer me.

ROSAMUND.

I have heard.

No wrong it may be with the serfs of hell
To cast upon a woman for a curse
Shame: to defile the spirit and shrine of love,
Put out the sunlike eyes of maidenhood
And leave the soul dismantled. Has not he
So sinned?--Hast thou wrought no such work as this?
The king has heard thy silence.

ALMACHILDES.

Queen and king,
I have done no wrong, but right. I have chosen my bride,
And made her mine by gentle grace of hers
Lest wrong should come between us. Now no man
May think to unwed us: king nor queen may cross
This wedded love of ours: no thwart or stay
May sunder us till heaven and earth turn hell.

ALBOVINE.

I deemed not thee dishonourable: and thy queen
Now knows thee true as I did. Rosamund,
Forgive and give him back his bride.

ROSAMUND.

I will,
King.

ALBOVINE.

Boy, thy queen hath shown thee grace; be thou
Thankful. I leave thee here to yield her thanks.
[Exit.

ALMACHILDES.

Queen, I would die to serve and thank thee.

ROSAMUND.

Die?
So young and glad and glorious? Thou shalt not
Die. Was thy bride's face bright to look upon
When last night's moon and stars illumined it?

ALMACHILDES.

Thou knowest I might not look upon it.

ROSAMUND.

No.
Thou hast never loved before?

ALMACHILDES.

I have loathed, not loved,
The loveless harlots clasped of all the camp:
I have followed wars and visions all my days
Even till my love's eyes lit and stung to life
The soul within my body. Till I loved,
I knew not woman.

ROSAMUND.

Now thou knowest. This love
Is no good lord--no gentle god--no soft
Saviour. Thou knowest perchance thy bride's name--hers
Whose body and soul were one but now with thine?

ALMACHILDES.

How should not I? What darkling light is this
That burns and broods and lightens in thine eyes,
Queen?

ROSAMUND.

Hildegard it was not.

ALMACHILDES.

Art not thou -
Or am not I--sun-smitten through the brain
By this mad might of midsummer? Who was it
That slept or slept not with me while the night
Was more than noon and more than heaven? What name
Was hers who made me godlike?

ROSAMUND.

Rosamund.

ALMACHILDES.

Thine? was it thou? It was not.

ROSAMUND.

It was I.

ALMACHILDES.

Does the sun stand in heaven? Or stands it fast
As when God bade it halt on high? My life
Is broken in me.

ROSAMUND.

Nay, fair sir, not yet.
Thy life is now mine--as the ring I wear
That seals my hand a wife's. Die thou shalt not,
But slay, and live.

ALMACHILDES.

Slay whom?

ROSAMUND.

Thy lord and mine.

ALMACHILDES.

I had rather go down quick to hell.

ROSAMUND.

I know it.
I leave thee not the choice. Keep thou thy hand
Bloodless, and Hildegard, whom yet I love,
Dies, and in fire, the harlot's death of shame.
Last night she lured thee hither. Hate of me,
Because of late I smote her, being in wrath

Forgetful of her noble maidenhood,
Stung her for shame's sake to take hands with shame.
This if I swear, may she unswear it? Thou
Canst not but say she bade thee seek her. She
Lives while I will, as Albovine and thou
Live by my grace and mercy. Live, or die.
But live thou shalt not longer than her death,
Her death by burning, if thou slay not him.
I see my death shine in thine eyes: I see
My present death inflame them. That were not
Her surety, Almachildes. Thou shouldst know me
Now. Though thou slay me, this may save not her.
My lines are laid about her life, and may not
By breach of mine be broken.

ALMACHILDES.

God must be
Dead. Such a thing as thou could never else
Live.

ROSAMUND.

That concerns not thee nor me. Be thou
Sure that my will and power to serve it live.
Lift now thine eyes to look upon thy lord.

Re-enter ALBOVINE.

ALBOVINE.

By this time hath he thanked thee not enough?

ROSAMUND.

More hath he given than thanks.

ALBOVINE.

What more may be?

ROSAMUND.

His plighted faith to heal the wrong he wrought
Faithfully.

ALBOVINE.

Boy, strike then thy hand in mine.
Thou art loyal as I knew thee.

ALMACHILDES.

King, I may not
Touch hands with thee.

ALBOVINE.

Thou art false, then, ha? Thou hast lied?

ALMACHILDES.

King, till the wrong I have wrought be wreaked or healed
I clasp not hands with honour. Nay, and then
Perchance I may not.

ALBOVINE.

Boy I called thee: child
I call thee now. But, boy, the child thou art
Is noble as our sires.

ALMACHILDES.

Would God it were!
[Exit.

ALBOVINE.

What ails him?

ROSAMUND.

Love and shame.

ALBOVINE.

No more than these?

ROSAMUND.

Enough are they to darken death and life.

ALBOVINE.

Thou art less than gentle towards his love and him.

ROSAMUND.

I would not speak ungently. Her I love,
Poor child, and him I hate not.

ALBOVINE.

Thou shalt live
To love him too.

ROSAMUND.

This heaviness of heat
Kills love and hate and life in me. I know not
Aught lovesome save the sweet brief death of sleep.

ALBOVINE.

I am weary as thou. Good night we may not say -
Good noon I bid thee. Sleep shall heal us.

ROSAMUND.

Ay;
No healing and no help for life on earth
Hath God or man found out save death and sleep.
[Exeunt.

ACT IV

The same Scene.

Enter ALMACHILDES and HILDEGARD.

HILDEGARD.

Hast thou forgiven me?

ALMACHILDES.

I have not forgiven
God.

HILDEGARD.

Wilt thou slay thy soul and mine?

ALMACHILDES.

Wilt thou
Madden me? God hath given us up to her
Who is deadlier than the fiery fang of death -
Us, innocent and loyal.

HILDEGARD.

Nay, if I
Forgive her love of thee--though this be hard,

Canst thou forgive not?

ALMACHILDES.

Sweet, for thee and me
Remains no rescue save by death or flight
From worse than flight or death is.

HILDEGARD.

Worse is nought
But shame: and how may shame take hold on us,
On us who have sinned not? Me she bound to play thee
False, and betray thee to her arms: I might not
Choose, though my heart should rend itself in twain
And cleave with ravenous anguish: yet I live.
Vex not thy soul too sorely: me, not her,
Thy spirit embraced, thine arms and lips made thine
Me, not my darkling wraith, my changeling foe,
My thief of love, our traitress. This I bid thee,
Forget thy fear and shame to have wronged me: night
Breeds treacherous dreams that can but poison day
If thought be found so base a fool as dares
Fear. Did I doubt thy love of me, I durst not
Live or look back upon thee.

ALMACHILDES.

Wilt thou then
Fly?

HILDEGARD.

Dost thou know what flight means--thou?
It means
Fear. And is fear a new-born friend of thine?

ALMACHILDES.

God help us! if he live, and hate not man -
If Satan be not God. We will not fly.

Enter ALBOVINE and ROSAMUND.

ALBOVINE.

Fly? What should love at height of happiness
Or youth at height of honour fear and fly?
Would ye take wing for heaven? take shame on earth
To wed in peace and honour?

ALMACHILDES.

No, my king.
No, surely.

ROSAMUND.

Weep not, maiden. Dost not thou,
Man, that we thought her bridegroom sealed of love,
Love her?

ALMACHILDES.

No saint loved ever God as I
Her.

ROSAMUND.

And betray her to shame thou wouldst not?
See,
My lord, the silent answer flash aloud
From cheek and eye a goodly witness. Thou,
My maiden, dost thou love not him? Nay, speak.

HILDEGARD.

I cannot say it--I cannot strive to say.

ROSAMUND.

Thou shalt. Are all we not fast bound in love -
My lord and thine, my maiden and her queen,
A fourfold chain of faith twice linked of love?
Speak: let not shame find place where shame is none.

HILDEGARD.

I will not. King and queen and God shall hear.
I love him as our songs of old time say
Men have been loved of women akin to gods
By blood as they by spirit, albeit in me
Nought lives that woman or man or God could say
Were worth his love, if mine by grace of love
Be found not all unworthy. Mine am I
No more: mine own in no wise now, but his
To save or slay, to cherish or cast out,
Crown and discrown, abase and comfort. Shame
Were more to me than honour if his will
It were that shame should clothe me round, and life
Were the only death left fearful if he bade me
Die. Could his love be turned from me, and set
On one less loving but more fair than I,
A thrall more base than treason or a queen
Too high for shame to brand her shameful, even
Though sin had stamped and signed her foul as fraud

And loathsome as a masked adulterous lie,
Hers would I make him if I might, and yield
To her the hatefullest of hell-born things
The man found lovelier by my love than heaven.

ROSAMUND.

Great love is this to brag of: great and strange.

HILDEGARD.

Love is no braggart: lust and fraud and hate
Vaunt their vile strength when shame unveils them: love
Vaunts not itself. I spake not uncompelled,
And blushed not out the avowal.

ALBOVINE.

Boy, I held
And hold thee noblest of my lords of war,
And worthier than thine elders born and tried
Ere battle found thee ripe and glad at heart
To stem and swim the tide of spears: but this
I know not if thou be or any man
Be worthy of.

ALMACHILDES.

Of all men born on earth
I am most unworthy of it. None might be
Worthy.

ROSAMUND.

He weeps: thy boy is humble.

ALMACHILDES.

Queen,
I weep not. Shamed with no ignoble shame
Thou seest me: but I weep not. Yea, God knows,
Humbled I am, and humble; not to thee.

ALBOVINE.

Chafe not: and thou, queen though thou be, and mine,
Tempt not a true man's wrath with words that bear
Fangs keener than thou knowest of.

ROSAMUND.

King, henceforth,
Being warned, I will not. Dangerous as the sea

A true man's wrath is--and a true man's love:
A woman's hath no peril in it: her tears
Wash wrath and peril away.

ALBOVINE.

I have never seen thee
Weep.

ROSAMUND.

How should I weep--I, thy wife?

ALBOVINE.

I have heard thee
Laugh; and thy smiles were always bright as fire.

ROSAMUND.

Well were it with me--ay, and reason found
For me to live and do the living world
Some service--could my husband warm thereat
His heart as winter-stricken hands in frost
Are warmed at winter fires.

ALBOVINE.

No need, no need:
The sun thou art warms all our year with love,
And leaves no chill on winter.

ROSAMUND.

Albovine,
Love now secludes us not from sight of man -
From sight of this my maiden and the man
Who shines but as the battle's boy for thee
But lives for me my maiden's lover--true
As truth is--Almachildes.

ALBOVINE.

How thy lips
Hang lingering on his name as though 'twere thou
That loved him! Thou shouldst love thy maiden well.

ROSAMUND.

As she loves me I love her. Hildegard,
Leave us. Thou knowest I love thee.

HILDEGARD.

Queen, I know. [Exit.

ALBOVINE.

What ails the boy? what rapturous agony
Torments and glorifies his glance at her
As with delight in torture? Cheer thee, man:
Thou art not thus all unworthy.

ROSAMUND.

Spare him, king.
A king may guess not how a man's heart yearns
With all unkingly sense of love and shame
Not all unmanly.

ALBOVINE.

Shame is none to be
Loved, and to deem that love exceeds our due
Who may not well deserve it. Sick at heart
He seems, and should be gladder than the sea
When wind and sun strike life in it.

ALMACHILDES.

I am not
So stricken, king. I thank thy care of me.

ALBOVINE.

Heart-stricken or shame-stricken art thou?

ROSAMUND.

King,
Spare him. Thou knowest not love like his. It burns
And rends and wrings the spirit.

ALBOVINE.

No. And thou,
Dost thou then?

ROSAMUND.

Eyes and heart and sense are mine
As weak and strong as woman's can but be;
As weak in strength and strong in weakness. Men,
Being wise, and mightier than their mates on earth,
Need no such knowledge born of inborn pain
As quickens all the spirit of sense in us.

Worms know what eagles know not.

ALBOVINE.

Like enough.

Rede me no redes and riddles. Never yet
I have loved thee more, and yet I have loved thee well,
Than now that loving-kindness borne toward love
Makes thee so gracious, pleading for it.

ROSAMUND.

Love

Sees all things lovely: thine, if praise there be,
Not mine the praise is: thee, not me, these twain
Must love and worship as their lord of love.

ALBOVINE.

Well, God be good to them and thee and me!
I would this fierce Italian June were dead,
So hard it weighs upon me.

ROSAMUND.

Now not long

Shall we sustain or sink aswoon from it:
It has but left a day or two to die.

ALBOVINE.

And well were that, if summer died with June.
Two red months more must set on sense and soul
The branding-iron stamped of summer: nay,
The sea is here no sea to cherish man:
It brings no choral comfort back with tides
That surge and sink and swell and chime and change
And lighten life with music where the breath
Dies and revives of night and day.

ROSAMUND.

Be thou

Content: a God hath driven us hither.

ALBOVINE.

Yea:

A God of death and fire and strife, whose hand
Is heavy on my spirit. Be not ye
Troubled, if peace be with you.

ROSAMUND.

Peace to thee.

[Exit ALBOVINE.

Now follow: smite him now: thou art strong, but yet
Thy king is stronger--mightier thewed than thou.
Thou couldst not slay him in fight.

ALMACHILDES.

I cannot slay him
Thus.

ROSAMUND.

Canst thou slay thy bride by fire? He dies,
Or she dies, bound against the stake. His death
Were the easier. Follow him: save her: strike but once.

ALMACHILDES.

I cannot. God requite thee this! I will. [Exit.

ROSAMUND.

And I will see it. And, father, thou shalt see.
[Exit.

ACT V

The Banqueting-hall.

Enter ALBOVINE and ROSAMUND.

ALBOVINE.

This June makes babes of men; last night I deemed
When thou hadst wished me peace as I passed forth
A footfall pressed behind me soft and fast,
And turning toward it I beheld nought: thee
I saw, and Almachildes hard at hand
Turned back toward thee: nought stranger: yet my heart
Sprang, and sank back. I laughed against myself,
That manhood should be girlish, when the heat
Burns life half out within us. Even thine eyes,
Like stars before the wind that brings the cloud,
Look fainter. Ere they fill the banquet full
And bid the guests about us where we sit,

Tell me if aught be worse than well with thee.

ROSAMUND.

Nought.

ALBOVINE.

Wilt thou swear it, sweet?

ROSAMUND.

By what thou wilt -
By God and man--by hell and earth and heaven.
I know what ails thy loyal heart of love
And binds thy tongue for fear to bid me know.
The cup we drank of when we feasted last
Tastes bitter on it yet. Thou wilt not bid me
Pledge thee therein again. If I bid thee,
Pledge me thou shalt--and seal thy pardon.

ALBOVINE.

Be not
Too sweet for woman.

ROSAMUND.

Cross me not in this.

ALBOVINE.

Mine old fast friend Narsetes hath my word
Plighted. All funeral reverence shall inter
The royal relic, and all thought therewith
Of strife between thy father's child and me
Or less than love and honour.

ROSAMUND.

Nay, my lord,
Let the dead thing live as a lifelong sign
Of perfect plight in love and union. This
Were no dishonour done to fatherhood
But honour shown to wedlock. Here is spread
The feast, the bride-feast of my love and thine,
Whereat the cup of death shall serve our lips
To drink forgetfulness of all but love.
Herein thou shalt not thwart me.

ALBOVINE.

God forbid.

ROSAMUND.

God hath forbidden: and God shall be obeyed.
Bid thy Narsetes play the cup-bearer,
And I will pour the wine: my hand shall fill
The sacramental draught of love that seals
Our eucharist of wedlock.

ALBOVINE.

Yea, I know
To drink with thee is even to drink with God.
Thou art good as any God was ever.

ROSAMUND.

Ay?
We know not till we die.

ALBOVINE.

Thou art wise and true
As ever maid was born of the oldworld north
In the oldworld years of legend. Bid Narsetes
Bring thee the chalice: thou shalt mix the draught
Whence we will drink life, if true love be life,
Even from the lipless mouth of bone that speaks
Death.

ROSAMUND.

I will mix it well with honey and herb
Sweet as the mead our fathers drank, and dreamed
Their gods so drank in heaven--draughts deep and strong
As life is strong and death is deep. I go
To bid Narsetes hither. [Exit.

ALBOVINE.

Nay, by God,
Whoever God be, never Christ or Thor
Beheld or blessed a nobler wife, whose love
Was found through proof of purity by fire
More like our northern stars and snows and suns,
And sane in strong sufficiency of soul
As womanhood by godhead from the womb
Elected and exalted.

Enter NARSETES.

NARSETES.

King, thy wife
Hath given me back thy message given her.

ALBOVINE.

Ay?
And thou hast given her back my cup, then?

NARSETES.

King,
I have given it. Loth to give it if I were,
Ye know: she knows as thou: thou knowest as she.

ALBOVINE.

What ails thee to distaste thy duty? Man,
Thou shouldst be glad, being loyal. Knowest thou not
Her will it was that we should pledge therein
To-night, this hour, our lifelong love, and seal it
More surely so than priest or prayer can seal?

NARSETES.

Her will it was, I know, not thine. I would
Thou hadst not yielded up to hers thy will.

ALBOVINE.

Thou liest: I have not yielded it: I have given
Love, willing as the springtide sea gives up
Her will to the eastern sea-wind's.

NARSETES.

Love should give
No more than love should crave of love: and this
Is such a gift as hate might crave of death
Or priests of God when angered.

ALBOVINE.

Hark thee, man.
Thou art old, and when I loved thee first and found thee
My lord and leader down the ways of war,
My master born by right of manfulness
And steersman through the surf of battle, time
Gaped as a gulf between us: sire and son
We might be: now I bid thee hold thy peace,
Lest all these memories perish, and their death
Give life more strong than theirs to wrath, and leave thee
Shelterless as a waif of the air when storm
Drives bird and beast to deathward. What I bade thee

I bid thee do, and leave me.

NARSETES.

King, I go. [Exit.

ALBOVINE.

What, have I played the Berserk with my friend?
So should not kings. What meant he? Men wax old,
And age eats out the natural sense of love
Which gives the soul sight of such nobler things
As trust may see by grace of truth more fair
Than doubt would fear to dream of. Rosamund
Knows more by might of faith and love than he.
And yet I would, and yet I would not, fool
As even in mine own eyes I am, she had not
Given me this proof, desired of me this sign,
How clear her soul is toward me save of love,
To attest her pardon of me. Would it were
Sunrise to-morrow!

Enter ALMACHILDES and HILDEGARD.

Whence come these, to bring
Sunrise about me? Nay, I bade you be
Here. Does thy memory too not fail thee, boy,
Burnt out by stress of summer

ALMACHILDES.

No.

ALBOVINE,

Nor hers?

HILDEGARD.

How might it, king? Thou art good to us.

ALBOVINE.

All things born
Seem good to lovers in their spring of love,
And all men should be. Maiden, God doth well
To give us foresight of the sight of heaven
By looking in such eyes as love like thine
Kindles and veils for love's sake. Fain was I
To see my boy's bride and her bridegroom here
Before the feast broke in on us, and bless
Their love with mine--if mine be blessing.

HILDEGARD.

Sire,

As the earth gives thanks in spring for the April sun
I would and cannot yield you thanks for this.

ALMACHILDES.

I cannot thank at all. I cannot thank
God.

ALBOVINE.

Art thou mazed with love? For her thou canst not
Thank God? What feverish doubt of love or life
Crazes or cramps thy spirit?

ALMACHILDES.

I cannot say.
My heart, if any heart be left in me,
Is as it was not thankless: yet, my king,
I know not how to thank thee.

ALBOVINE.

Thank me not:
I did not bid thee thank me. Love thy love,
And God be with you: so may God be found
Thankworthier. Keep some heart in thee awhile
For God's and her sake.

ALMACHILDES.

All I may I will.

Re-enter ROSAMUND, followed by NARSETES and Guests.

ALBOVINE.

Sit, friends and warriors: thou, my boy, next me,
And by my wife thy bride. This night, that leaves
But two days more for June to burn and live,
Plights with my queen's troth mine in life and death
This last one time for ever, in the cup
Whence none shall drink hereafter. Not in scorn,
Sirs, but in honour now the draught is pledged
Between us, ere this relic stand enshrined
And hallowed as a saint's on the altar. Queen,
I drink to thee.

ROSAMUND.

I thank thee. Good Narsetes,
Give him the chalice. Women slain by fire
Thirst not as I to pledge thee.
[As ALBOVINE is about to take the cup,
ALMACHILDES rises and stabs him.

ALBOVINE.

Thou, my boy? [Dies.

ROSAMUND.

I. But he hears not. Now, my warrior guests,
I drink to the onward passage of his soul
Death. Had my hand turned coward or played me false,
This man that is my hand, and less than I
And less than he bloodguilty, this my death
Had been my husband's: now he has left it me.
[Drinks.
How innocent are all but he and I
No time is mine to tell you. Truth shall tell.
I pardon thee, my husband: pardon me. [Dies.

NARSETES.

Let none make moan. This doom is none of man's.

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moan. This doom is none of man's.

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