

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock C 2003

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Etext by Dagny

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Etext by Dagny

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CHARACTERS:

NICEPHORUS, Emperor of Constantinople

IRENE, wife of Nicephorus

ALEXIS COMNENUS, Prince of Greece

LEONCE, father of Irene

MEMNON, attache to Prince Alexis

ZOE, favorite, follower of Irene

AN OFFICER

GUARDS

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The Action takes place in a room of the old Palace of Constantine.

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ACT I

IRENE: What new change, what somber terror
Has separated us from the court and the emperor?
At the palace of seven towers a strange guard
In a dismal silence astonishes my sight here.
They've changed the court into a vast desert.

ZOE: In the walls of Constantine, too often a fine day
Is followed by horrors of most funereal storm.
The court is no longer the noisy assembly
Of all our idle pleasures chained to one another.
Deceivers soothe unfortunate hearts.
You must retire from the importunate crowd.
Our Senators are assembled to reform the empire,
To ruin it, perhaps, and these fierce Muslims,
These vagabond Scythes, overrunning our fields,
Thousands of hidden enemies that we must yet fear,
Without doubt, at this moment are occupying Nicephorus.

IRENE: Of his secret pains which he tries to dissemble,
I know the cause too well; it's going to overwhelm me.
I know with what suspicions his harsh jealousy
In his uneasiness outrages his spouse.
He hears in secret these detestable flatterers
Of a suspicious mind, detestable impostors,
Trafficking in lies and calumny
And covering virtue with their ignominy.
What a job for Caesar! and what sorrowful duties!
I pity him, I moan it makes it twice as bad!
Ah! why didn't I embrace that austere retreat
Where, after my marriage, my father shut himself up!
He fled the illusion of courts forever.
Hope which seduces us, which always deceives us,
Fear which freezes us, and cruel pain,
Which makes an eternal war on itself.
Why didn't I trample under foot my funereal grandeur!
I mounted the throne in misfortune,
I am weeping before you my high destiny.
And I am weeping especially for this fatal memory
That my duty condemns, and makes me banish.
Here, the air you breath poisons my life.

ZOE: At least Nicephorus' somber jealousy
Hasn't manifested itself by indiscreet outbursts.
The shameful sentiment which torments him,
He hides from the vulgar, from his court, from himself.
He knows how to respect you, and perhaps he loves you.
You are seeking to nourish an unjust sorrow.
What are you afraid of?

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

IRENE: Heaven, Alexis, and my heart.

ZOE: But Alexis Comnenus in the fields of the Taurida
Given entirely to glory and to duty which guides him,
Is serving the Emperor and you without disturbing you,
Faithful to his oaths to the point of avoiding you.

IRENE: I know that this hero is seeking only glory.
I don't know how to pity myself for it.

ZOE: He has through victory
Reaffirmed this long tottering empire.

IRENE: Ah! I've admired his dazzling exploits too much.
His distant glory has interested me too much.
Caesar will have surprised in the depth of my thought
Some indiscreet vows that I've been unable to hide,
And that a spouse, a master, may rightfully reproach.
Heaven created me for Alexis;
From ancient Caesars we received life
And from our cradle, betrothed to each other,
It's in these same places we were united.
It's with Alexis I was raised.
The interest of state, this pretext invented
To betray his promise with impunity;
This terrifying phantom subjected my family;
My father sacrificed his daughter to his pride.
The crown of the Caesars was thought to hide my tears;
They decorated my pain in dazzling grandeur.
I had to extinguish, in my deep sorrow,
A passion more dear to me than the empire of the world.
I needed to tear myself away from the master of my heart.
Weeping, I dared to detach myself even from myself,
With the invincible power of religion,
Aiding my weakness in this guilty combat,
And learning to arm myself with this great aid,
I took the frightful oath of never loving.
I'll keep it. That word must make you grasp well enough
What renderings this heart must await.
My father, having been capable of exposing me to this storm,
Would have me learn to appease it by his virtues.
He left the court, he fled Nicephorus,
He abandons me to the prey of a world he abhors.
And I have only you alone to whom I can open
This weak and wounded heart that nothing can cure.
But they are opening the palace I see Memnon appear.

(Enter Memnon.)

IRENE: Well, can I see your master in freedom?
Memnon, can I, in my turn, be admitted today

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

Amongst the courtiers who approach him?

MEMNON: Madame, I will admit that he wants, in your sight,
To hide the pains of his beaten soul.
I am not counted among the courtiers
Superbly confident of his secret plans:
Caesar shuts me from the entrance to his councils,
Commandant of his guard at the sacred gate,
A soldier forgotten by his old masters,
Relegated to my post like my warriors,
Only now I learned that the brave Comnenus
Long ago left the shores of Borystena,
That he's travelling towards Byzantium and the worried Caesar
Listens all atremble to his assembled council.

IRENE: Alexis, you say?

MEMNON He's scouring the Bosphorous.

IRENE: He could offend Nicephorus to this degree!
To return without his order!

MEMNON: They are sure of it, and the court
Is alarmed, divided, and trembles at his return.
They say, he's broken the honorable slavery
In which the jealous Emperor retained his courage.
He's coming here to enjoy his honors and his rights.
That's all I could learn from these sudden rumors
Which are creating so many idle hopes in these parts,
And which, from mouth to mouth, are arming factions,
To prepare Byzantium for revolutions.
As for me, I know enough what role I must take,
What master I must follow, and who I must defend.
I am not consulting our ministers, our grandees,
Their hidden interests, their different factions,
Their false friendships, their indiscreet hates.
Attached without reserve to the pure blood of the Comnenus,
I am serving him, and especially in extremities,
Memnon will be faithful to the blood from which you come.
Time doesn't permit me to say more of it.
Allow me to fly back to where my duty engages me.

(Memnon leaves.)

IRENE: What has he dared to tell me?
And what new danger is coming to afflict me again?
He didn't explain: I'm afraid of understanding him.

ZOE: Memnon is simply a warrior prompt for all undertakings.
I know him: blood joins him to us sufficiently.
Exhaling his scorn against our courtiers,

ACT I

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

He always detested their frivolous insolence,
Their animosities which divide Byzantium,
Their sad vanities that follow dishonor.
But his high mind especially hates the emperor.
Secretly, he's idolatrous of Alexis,
And if he's to be believed, Byzantium is a stage
Which will soon produce one of those reversals
Whose bloody spectacle enflames the universe.
You won't be astonished if his somber wrath
Escapes itself in speaking to you and depicts his character.

IRENE: But Alexis is coming back Caesar is irritated.
The surprised courtiers murmur, shocked.
The Senators convened in uncertain Byzantium,
Long weary of sovereign grandeur,
Trouble the whole empire with their divisions.
The whole populace is enflamed with the fire of factions.
What can I hope from Memnon's speech?
He commands a foreign guard at the palace.
Is he in secret, the confidant of Alexis?
How I fear from Alexis' imprudent return,
The designs of the Senate, the delirium of the populace
And the burgeoning storm which threatens the empire!
How I fear myself in my just sorrow!
In secret I consult the trembling of my heart.
Perhaps it's preparing me for a terrible future.
In creating it, heaven made it very sensitive.
If Alexis ever, in this funereal place,
Betrays his oaths What do I see? Just God!

(Enter Alexis.)

ALEXIS: Deign to suffer my sight, and banish your fears.
I am not coming to trouble you with useless complaints,
A heart to which mine must sacrifice itself,
And to recall the times that we must forget.
Fates ravished from me sovereign grandeur.
It's done me further outrage; it deprived me of Irene.
In the submissive Orient my services rendered
Ought to have earned the treasures I lost;
But when they placed Nicephorus on the throne
Glory no longer spoke in my favor.
And having for support only our common ancestors,
I did not attempt anything which could make me approach them.
Today, Trebizond is delivered into our hands,
The Scythians repressed, Taurida conquered,
Are the rights which have finally recalled me towards you.
The reward for my labors was to be exiled!
Am I still by you? Don't you dare recognize
In my blood the blood which gave you birth?

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

IRENE: Prince, what are you saying? In what time, in what places,
By this fatal return are you astonishing my eyes?
You know quite well what yoke holds me captive.
The eternal barrier raised between us,
Our duties, our oaths, and especially this law
Which doesn't permit you to show yourself to me.
To calm the unjust suspicion of Caesar,
It would have sufficed for you to avoid my presence.
You haven't foreseen what you are risking.
You are making me tremble; lord, you are ruining yourself.

ALEXIS: If I feared for you I would be more culpable,
My presence would be more suspicious.
What then! Am I in Byzantium? Is it you that I see?
Is this a jealous Sultan who holds you under his sway?
Are you in Greece a slave from Asia
That a despot, a barbarian purchased in Circassia,
That they throw in prison with cruel monsters,
Forever invisible to the rest of mortals?
Has Caesar changed in his somber crudity
The mind of the West and the morals of Greece?

IRENE: From the day that Nicephorus received my faith,
You know quite well, everything changed for me.

ALEXIS: Except my heart: destiny created it for Irene.
It braves the power and hate of Caesar.
It fears nothing but you! What! your last subjects
Would have free access to their empress!
All mortals will enjoy the happiness of her sight!
Has Nicephorus forbidden in it me alone?
And am I a criminal to his jealous glance,
Since they made him Caesar, and he is your husband?
Puffed up with this august marriage
Does the excess of his happiness render him more unjust?

IRENE: He is my sovereign.

ALEXIS: No, he wasn't born
To despoil me of the treasure that was my destiny.
He isn't worthy of it and the blood of Comnenus
Wasn't transmitted to you to serve in his chains.
Let him govern, if he can, with his strict hands
This empire, formerly the Roman Empire,
That to the fields of Thrace, to the seas of Trebizond
Constantine transported to the misfortune of the world.
And that I've defended, less for him than for you.
Let him reign, if he must; I am not jealous to that degree.
I am following him for you alone; and never will my courage
Pardon him for your unworthy slavery.
You are hiding misfortunes of which your tears are the guarantee;

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

And usurpers are always tyrants.
But if heaven is just, it will perhaps recall
That it owes the empire a less barbarous master.

IRENE: Too idle regrets! I am a slave to my faith.
Lord, I've given it, it's no longer mine.

ALEXIS: Ah! you owe it to me.

IRENE: And it's up to you to believe
That I'm no longer to keep the memory of it.
I made those vows for you and you are overwhelming me.

(Enter a guard.)

GUARD: Lord, Caesar demands you.

ALEXIS: He will see me; leave. (to Irene)
He will see me, Madame, such an interview
Must not worry your combative soul.
Don't fear for him; don't fear for me.
I know, at least, what I owe to his rank.
Return to your hearth, calm and reassured.

(Alexis leaves.)

IRENE: With what a seizure my soul is penetrated!
How I feel weakness and horror at the same time!
Each word that he said to me filled me with terror.
What's he intend? Go, Zoe, direct that every hour
They secretly survey this sad dwelling,
These seven frightful towers, that, since Constantine,
Have seen the horrible fate of so many heroes.
Question Memnon, take pity on my fear.

ZOE: I will go; I will observe this terrible enclosure.
But I am trembling for you; a suspicious master
Will perhaps condemn you and proscribe the two of you.
Among so many dangers what do you intend to do?

IRENE: To keep my pure and simple word to my spouse,
To vanquish a fatal love, if its reignited fire
Is reborn in this previously enflamed heart.
To remain sovereign mistress of my feelings
If strength is possible to human weakness.
Not to fight in vain my duty and my fate;
And not to dishonor either my life or my death.

CURTAIN

ACT II

MEMNON: Yes, you are summoned; but Caesar is deliberating.

In his unease he consults, he delays,
Shut up with vile flatterers.
No question, the return of a hero has alarmed him.
But we still have time to speak to each other.
This room which leads to those of Nicephorus
Also leads to Irene's and I command here.
Of all your partisans have no fear.
I have prepared them. If this iniquitous court
Dares to raise its despotic sword on you,
Count on your friends. You will see this pompous lot
Of proud slaves flee before them.
At the first motion our valiant escort
Are going to seize gates from the ramparts of the seven towers.
And the others, armed under clothes of peace,
Unknown to Caesar, are filling this palace.
Nicephorus fears you because he is offending you.
He places his confidence in this funereal castle.
There, in complete repose, with a word, with a blink of the eye,
He condemns to exile, to torture, to death.
He dares to count me among the mercenaries
Of his capricious frightful bloody ministers.
He's deceiving himself. Lord, what secret difficulty,
When I've prepared everything, seems to stop your steps?

ALEXIS: Remorse. My heart must confess to you
Some fortunate exploits for which Europe is praising me,
My birth, my rank, the favor of the Senate,
All are shouting to me: Come, show yourself to the state.
That voice excited me. Scorn urges me on.
My fatal passion dragged my youth.
I came to oppose glory to grandeur,
To share brotherhood and brave the emperor.
I arrive, and I foresee my new career.
Must I raise the standard of a rebel?
Shame is attached to this dangerous name.
Will I see myself carried beyond where I want to go?

MEMNON: Shame! it's for you to serve under a master.

ALEXIS: I dare to be his rival; I fear the name of traitor.

MEMNON: Be his enemy in the field of honor.
Dispute the empire with him and be his conqueror.

ALEXIS: Do you think that the Bosphorous, and proud Thrace,
And these feckless Greeks will serve so much audacity?
I know that the estates are full of senators

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

Attached to my race, and whose hearts I have.
They are capable of supporting my bloody quarrel.
But the people?

MEMNON: They love you; they are calling you to the throne.
Their courage is short-lived, they are dazzled by a great uproar.
A moment gives it birth; a moment destroys it.
I am inflaming this passion; and I dare tell you again
That I will answer to you for the hearts of all the empire.
Just appear, my prince, and you will make
The senate and the people instant conspirators.
In this bloody palace, abode of homicides,
Revolutions were always rapid.
Twenty times it sufficed to change the whole state
By the voice of a pontiff or the shout of a soldier.
These sudden changes are lightning bolts
Which in serene days burst over the earth.
The less they are foreseen, the less one can escape
Those devouring darts with which one feels oneself struck
We've seen these fugitive shades strike,
Phantom emperors raised on our shores,
Tumbling from the height of a throne into eternal oblivion,
Where their name in a moment is lost in shrouds.
It's time at Byzantium a man be recognized
Who's worthy of true Caesars and Rome's finest days.
Byzantium is offering to your hands sovereign power.
Those I've seen reign had only the will.
Carried into the hippodrome, they had only to appear
Decorated by the purple and the scepter of a master.
At the temple of Sophia a priest consecrates them,
And Byzantium, suddenly on its knees, adores them.
They had less than you of friends and courage
They had less right; attempt the same work!
Gather up the debris of their broken scepters;
You will reign today, lord, if you dare.

ALEXIS: Friend, you know me: I dare anything for Irene.
Alone she has banished me, alone she brought me back;
Alone over my still irresolute mind
Irene has kept her absolute power.
Nothing else is keeping me back;
They threaten her and I love her.

MEMNON: I deceive myself, lord, or the emperor himself
Is coming to dictate his decisions to you in this retired place.
Will you still wait for him?

ALEXIS: Yes, I will answer him.

MEMNON: His guard is already appearing; it's confided to me.
If the studied hate of your enemy

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

Has conceived some secret designs against you
We will serve under Comnenus, and we are Romans.
I am leaving you with him.

(Memnon withdraws to the back and places himself at the head of the guards.)

(Nicephorus enters followed by two officers.)

NICEPHORUS: Prince, your presence
Has thrown a little challenge into my court.
On the shores of the Euxine sea you've served me really well
But when Caesar commands, he must be obeyed.
You are being watched here with an attentive glance.
You are giving a dangerous example to the populace.
You mustn't appear within the walls of Constantine
Except on an express order emanating from my hand.

ALEXIS: I didn't know it. The Senate of the empire
Knows little of these laws you wish to prescribe.
I was able, without fail, to fulfill the will
Of an august and sacred body, and respected by you.

NICEPHORUS: I shall protect it as long as it is faithful;
Be so, trust me; but since it is recalling you,
It is I who am sending you to the shores of the Euxine.
Leave this moment the walls of Constantine.
You have no further excuse; and towards the Bosphorous
The day star which shines will see you off again.
You are no more for me anything but a subject in revolt.
You will not be so with impunity.
That's what Caesar intended to tell you.

ALEXIS: The great by whose acclamation you were given the empire
Made me the first person in the state after you,
Lord, could bend this violent wrath.
They know my name, my rank, and my service,
And you yourself, with them, will give me justice.
You will let me live within these sacred walls
That my arm has delivered from your enemies.
You will not separate me from an inviolable right
That the law of the State only ravishes from the guilty.

NICEPHORUS: You dare to pretend to it?

ALEXIS: A simple citizen
Would dare it, is owed it, and my right and his
Is that of all mortals; fate which outrages me
Has not marked my face with the seal of slavery.
It's the right of Alexis; and I believe it is due
To the blood which has been shed for you many times,
To the blood whose valor has paid your glory

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

And which can equal without increasing very much
The blood of Nicephorus formerly unknown
Today reaching the rank of my ancestors.

NICEPHORUS: I know your race, and what's more your arrogance.
For the last time, beware my vengeance.
You will not obey me?

ALEXIS: No, lord.

NICEPHORUS: That's enough. (calling Memnon to him by a gesture, he gives him a note in the back)
You who obey me, serve the empire, and me.

(Nicephorus leaves.)

MEMNON: Me, serve Nicephorus!

ALEXIS: (after having observed first the place where he finds himself)
First, I must learn
What this note you were just given says.

MEMNON: Look.

ALEXIS: (after having calmly read a part of the note)
In his council the order was taken!
And I should have been made to wait for this atrocity!
He flatters himself that as master he condemned Comnenus.
He signed my death.

MEMNON: He signed his.
Surrounded by slaves, this shadowy tyrant,
This blind despot thought me cowardly like them.
How this palace has produced the habit
And the barbarism of servitude!
So long as our shaky Caesars on their frightful throne
Think to reign without laws and speak like sultans!
But get it over with, read this pitiless order.

ALEXIA: (rereading) This despot is more culpable than I thought.
Irene, prisoner! Is it really true, Memnon?

MEMNON: For the great, their tomb is near the prison.

ALEXIS: O heaven! Is Irene informed of your projects?

MEMNON: She can suspect it, both the cause and the result.
The rest is unknown.

ALEXIS: Let's avoid afflicting her;
And especially, dear friend, let's hide her danger from her.
The enterprise must soon be discovered.

ACT II

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

But that's when my victory or my ruin will be known.

MEMNON: Our friends are joined to these brave soldiers.

ALEXIS: Are they ready to march?

MEMNON: Lord, don't doubt it.

At this moment their troupe is going to open a passage.
Believe that friendship, zeal and courage
Are of a greater service in these urgent perils
Than all the battalions paid by tyrants.
I see them advancing toward the sacred gate.
The Emperor himself is going to defend the entrance.
I already hear the shouts of the roused populace.

ALEXIS: We have only a moment; I reign or I perish.
Fate is cast. Let's forestall Nicephorus. (to soldiers)
Come, brave friends, with whom my destiny honors me,
You've fought under Memnon and under me,
Fight for Irene, and avenge her virtue.
Irene belongs to me, I cannot take her back
Except under waves of blood and under walls of ashes.
Let's march without hesitation.

(Enter Irene.)

IRENE: Where are you rushing? O heaven!
Alexis! stop: what are you doing? cruel one!
Remain: surrender to my legitimate concerns.
Avoid your ruin, spare yourself crimes.
I'm frozen with terror at the very name of revolt.
It speaks to me of blood which is going to pour out for me.
I'm no longer permitted, in my mute sorrow,
To devour my tears in the depth of my retreat.
My father, at this moment, excited by the populace,
Is heading towards the palace which he deserted.
The pontiff is following him, and in his ministry
Attesting to the wrath of God whom they are outraging.
They are both seeking you in these pressing dangers.
Lord, hear them.

ALEXIS: Irene, there isn't time.
The quarrel is too great, it is too urgent.
I will listen to them when you've been avenged.

(Exit Alexis, Memnon, and their friends.)

IRENE: He's fleeing me! What will become of me?
O heaven! and what a moment!
My husband is going to perish or strike down my lover!
I am throwing myself in your arms, O God who caused my birth!

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

You, who made my fate, who gave me for a master
A respectable mortal who received my word;
That I ought to love, if possible, despite myself!
I heard my reason, but my unfaithful soul,
Wanting to obey you, rose against it.
Lead my steps, sustain this weak reason,
Give life to this heart dying by its poison.
Restore peace to the empire as well as to myself.
Preserve my husband: order me to love him.
The heart depends on you: human misfortunes
Are the vile instruments of your divine hands.
In this terrible disorder watch over Nicephorus.
And when my despair implores you for my spouse,
If other feelings are still permitted to me,
God, who knows how to pardon, watch over Alexis.

ZOE: (returning) They are in our hands; return

IRENE: And my father?

ZOE: He's coming;

He's parting the waves of people, and the fearful crowd
Of women, old men, children, who in their arms
Push to heaven cries that heaven does not hear.
The holy pontiff, with a useful aid
To the wounded, to the dying, in vain is giving asylum.
The fierce conquerors are sacrificing on the altar
The escaped vanquished from this cruel battle.
Don't expose yourself to this populace in fury.
I see Byzantium falling, and the fatherland perishing,
That our trembling hands cannot revive
But you can ruin yourself trying to save them.
At least await some news of the battle.

IRENE: No, Zoe, heaven wants me to fall with her.

No, I must not live in our burning walls,
In the midst of tombs that my hands have created.

CURTAIN

ACT III

ZOE: Your unique role, madame, was to await
The irrevocable decree that destiny is going to render.
In the ranks of soldiers, a Scythian would have been able
To call on danger and to seek death;
Under the rigorous heavens of their savage climate,
The harshness of morals has produced these customs.
Nature has established other laws for us.
Let's submit ourselves to fate, and whatever may be its choice

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

Let's accept, if need be, the master that it gives us.
By birth, Alexis touched the crown,
His valor deserved it; he brings to this battle
That great heart and that arm which defended the state.
Especially in his favor he has the public voice.
It detests a tyrannical power
As much as it cherishes an oppressed hero.
He'll conquer because he is loved.

IRENE: Eh! what's the use of being loved?
You are just more unfortunate. I feel that myself too much.
I fear discovering if it is true that I love him,
To question my heart and only dare
To ask what is the result of the battle.
How much blood was spilled, who are the victims,
How many crimes I have gathered together in this palace?
They are all my work.

ZOE: To your just sorrows
Do you want to add the terrors of remorse?
Your father left his holy retreat
Where his sad virtue is hidden unknown.
It's for you he's viewing these dangerous mortals again,
Whose approach he fled to the shadow of altars.
He was dead to the world; he's returning to it for his daughter,
In this same palace where his family reigned.
You will find consolation in him
That destiny is refusing to your affliction.
Throw yourself into his arms.

IRENE: Will he find me worthy of him?
Have I deserved what this effort reveals,
Bringing him to his daughter in this cruel abode,
Where for me he affronts the horrors of the court?

(Leonce enters.)

IRENE: Is it you who contemplates my despair in these parts?
Support of the unfortunate, my father, my example.
What! you are leaving the abode of peace for me!
Alas! what crimes have you seen in it?

LEONCE: The walls of Constantine are a field of carnage.
Thanks to heaven, I am unaware what astonishing storm,
What court interests, what factions,
Have suddenly given birth to these desolations.
They've told me that Alexis, armed against his master,
Has dared to appear with conspirators.
One said that he received the death that he deserved.
The other that his emperor was fleeing before him.
They believe Caesar is wounded; the battle is still going on

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

From the gates of the seven towers
To the shores of the Bosphorous.
Tumult, death and crime are in these parts.
I am coming to snatch you from these odious walls.
If you have lost in this funereal battle
An empire, a husband, let virtue remain to you.
I have seen too many Caesars in this bloody abode
From this throne degraded overturned one after the other
Only that of God, my daughter, is unshakeable.

IRENE: They're coming to complete the horror which overwhelms me.
And here are the warriors who are announcing my fate to me.

(Enter Memnon and soldiers.)

MEMNON: He's no longer tyrant, it's done, he's dead.
I saw it. It was in vain that repressing his rage,
While holding under his feet this fatal adversary,
Alexis, his conqueror, wished to spare him.
The populace was bathing in his burning blood. (coming forward)
Madame, Alexis reigns, everything conspires with my wishes.
A single day has changed the fate of the empire.
While Victory on our happy ramparts
Raises with its hands the throne of the Caesars,
While Alexis is restoring peace, he is sending me to your feet
To interpret and witness the public joy.
Forgive, if his mouth at this same moment
Doesn't announce this great event,
If the effort of stopping the blood and carnage
Still busies his courage far from your eyes;
If he's unable to bring to your sacred knees
The laurels that his hands have gathered for you.
I am flying to the Hippodrome, to the Temple of Sophia,
To the assembled estates to save the country.
We are all going to name with the holy name of emperor
The hero of Byzantium and its liberator.

(He leaves.)

IRENE: What ought I to do? O God!

LEONCE: Believe a father and follow him.
In this abode of blood you cannot live
Without rendering yourself execrable to posterity.
I know that Nicephorus was too brutal;
But he was your spouse: respect his memory,
The duties of a wife, and especially your glory.
I will not tell you that it is appropriate for you
To avenge by blood, the blood of your spouse.
That's only a barbarous right, a power that's founded
On the false prejudices of false worldly honor.

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

But it's a frightful crime, which cannot be expiated
By being in communication with the murderer.
Contemplate your condition: on one side is presented
An audacious youth whose bloody hand
Has just sacrificed a master to his ambition.
On the other is duty and religion,
True honor, virtue, God himself.
I won't speak to you of a father who loves you.
It's you that I want to believe in; listen to your heart.

IRENE: I'm listening to your advice: lord, they are just.
They are sacred. I know that a respectable custom
Prescribes solitude to my fatal widowhood.
I ought to seek peace in your holy refuge,
For in this bloody palace, I've never known it.
I have too great a need to flee, both this world that I love
And its horrible prestige and flee even from myself.

LEONCE: Come then, dear support of my decrepitude.
With me forget all that I have left
In the breast of the retreat; believe there is still
Consolation for an unquiet soul.
There I found that peace that you are searching for in vain.
I will lead you there, I know the way.
I am going to prepare everything Swear to your father,
By the God who leads me, and whose eye enlightens you,
That you will fulfill, in these sad ramparts,
The duties imposed on the widows of Caesars.

IRENE: It's true these duties can seem austere,
But if they are strict, they are necessary to me.

LEONCE: Let Alexis be forever forgotten by us.

IRENE: If I must forget him why speak to me of him?
I know that I ought to have asked you for mercy
These bonds you are offering me and that I must embrace.
After the frightful storm that I've just endured
In the port with you all must be forgotten.
I've hated this palace, where a flattering court
Offered me vain pleasures, and thought me happy.
If it's tainted with blood, I ought to detest it.
Eh! what regret, lord, ought I to have to quit it?
God has commanded it to me through the voice of a father.
I owe him obedience and I am going to satisfy you.
I am placing in your hands a solemn oath.
I am descending from this throne and I am marching to the altar.

LEONCE: Goodbye: remember this terrible oath.

(Leonce leaves.)

ACT III

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

ZOE: What is this new yoke that on your sensitive heart
A father imposes anew on this terrifying day?

IRENE: Yes, I intend to fulfill this strict oath.
Yes, I intend to consummate my fatal sacrifice.
I am changing prisons, I'm changing tortures.
You, who, always present to my diverse torments
To the trouble of my heart, to the weight of my fetters
Shared so many troubles and secret sorrows,
Will you dare to follow me to the depth of these retreats
Where my unhappy days are going to be enshrouded?

ZOE: Mine are at all time subjected to yours.
I see that our sex is born for slavery.
On the throne, at all times, that was your share.
Those moments, so brilliant, so short, so deceitful,
That they called your fine days were lengthy misfortunes.
Sovereign in name, you served a master.
And when you were free, and that you ought to be,
The dangerous weight of your dignity
Instantly plunged you back into captivity!
Customs, laws, public opinion,
All hold you under a tyrannic yoke.

IRENE: I will wear my chain I'm no longer permitted
To dare to interest myself in the plans of Alexis.
I cannot breathe the air that he breathes.
Let him be the savior of the empire to other eyes,
Let them cherish in him the greatest of Caesars,
He is only a criminal to my sad sight.
He is only a parricide, and my soul is constrained
To drive Alexis from my sad thoughts.
If, in the solitude that I am going to enclose myself in,
I recollect to myself that Alexis was lovable,
That he was a hero I will be very culpable.
Go, my dear Zoe, go hurry my departure,
Save me from an abode that I have left too late.
I am going to find the pontiff and my father immediately.
And I am striding fearlessly towards
The pure day which enlightens me. (seeing Alexis)
Heaven!

(Enter Alexis and guards; the guards retire after having placed a trophy at Irene's feet.)

ALEXIS: On this day of terror, I am placing at your feet
All that I owe you, an empire and my heart.
I wasn't fighting over this funereal empire;
It was nothing without you: celestial justice
Ought to despoil unworthy sovereigns
Only to reestablish it with your august hands.
Reign, since I reign, and let this day begin

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

My happiness, and yours and that of Byzantium.

IRENE: What a horrifying joy! Ah! prince! you are forgetting that you are covered with the blood of my husband?

ALEXIS: Yes! I intend to efface his memory from the earth,
So that his name will be lost in the dazzle of my glory.
That in its happiness the Roman Empire
Will be unaware if he ever reigned, if he ever was.
I know that these great blows, the first day
Are murmuring through astonished Asia and Greece.
It gives rise to censors, to rivals.
Soon, accustomed to its new masters
They will end by loving their established power.
Let them know a governor, madam, and everything's forgotten.
After a few moments of a just severity
That the public interest demands of a conqueror,
You will bring back the fine times in which happy Livia
Made the submissive earth adore Augustus.

IRENE: Alexis! Alexis! we are only abusing ourselves.
Crime and death have marched behind our steps.
Blood shrieks: it rises, it demands justice.
Murderer of Caesar, am I your accomplice?

ALEXIS: That blood saved yours and you are punishing me for it?
Who? me? I'm guilty in your offended eyes!
A jealous despot, a pitiless master,
Thanks only to the name of husband is respectable for you!
His days were sacred to you! and your defender
Was only a rebel, then, only a ravisher!
When I dared to defend you against your tyrant
Ought I to have expected your ingratitude?

IRENE: I wasn't ungrateful: one day you will learn
The unhappy battles of my torn feelings.
You will pity a woman in whom, from her infancy
Her heart and her relatives formed the hope
Of spending the unalterable course of her life
Under the laws, under the eyes of a hero of our time.
You will then know what it cost, what she sacrificed
The happiness of her life to her sacred duties.

ALEXIS: What! You are weeping, Irene! and you are abandoning me!

IRENE: We are condemned to flee each other forever.

ALEXIS: Eh! who then condemns us? a fanatic law,
A senseless respect for ancient custom
Embraced by a populace in love with errors,
Scorned by Caesars and especially by conquerors!

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

IRENE: Nicephorus holds me enslaved from the tomb.
And his death separates us yet further than his life.

ALEXIS: Dear and fatal Irene, arbitress of my fate,
You are avenging Nicephorus and giving death to me.

IRENE: Live, reign without me, make the empire happy.
Fate is seconding you: it intends that another expire.

ALEXIS: And you deign to speak with so much goodness
And you are being stubborn with so much cruelty!
What you are offering me is worse than hate and wrath?
Will you be to yourself even totally contrary?
I see, a father is constraining you to flee me.
To who else would you have promised to betray yourself?

IRENE: To myself, Alexis.

ALEXIS: No, I cannot believe it.
You didn't seek this frightful victory,
You aren't renouncing the blood you come from.
To your submissive subjects, to your properties,
To go shut this adored head
In the obscure redoubt of a holy prison.
Your father is deceiving you: an imprudent error,
After having seduced him, is seducing your heart.
It's a new tyrant whose hand is oppressing you.
He's sacrificed himself and is making you his victim.
Has he fled humans so as to torment them?
Is he coming out of his tomb to persecute us?
More cruel towards you than even Nicephorus,
Does he want to murder a daughter that he loves?
I am rushing to him, madame, and I don't intend
That he give laws against me in my realm.
If he scorns the court and his heart abhors it,
I won't suffer that he still govern it.
And that the imprudent severity of his mind
Persecute his blood, his master, and his avenger.

(Enter Zoe.)

ZOE: Madame, they are waiting for you; Leonce, your father,
The minister of god who rules the sanctuary,
Are ready to escort you; alas, according to your wishes,
To this august asylum happy or unhappy.

IRENE: Everything is ready: I follow you.

ALEXIS: And as for me, I am forestalling you.
I am going to repress the insolence of these ingrates.
To assure myself in their eyes of the reward of my labors

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

And twice in one day to conquer all my rivals.

(Exit all but Irene.)

IRENE: What's going to become of me? How shall I escape
This horrible precipice, this redoubtable trap,
Into which my distracted steps are leading me despite myself?
My lover has killed my husband and my king
And on his bloody corpse this raging hand
Dares to ignite for me the torch of marriage!
He intends that this mouth on the steps of the altar
Swear an eternal love to his murderer!
Yes, great God, I love him; and my distracted soul
Is still intoxicated with this fatal poison.
What do you want from me, dangerous Alexis?
Lover that I cherish, lover that I am abandoning,
Are you forcing me into crime and do you still intend
To be more my tyrant than Nicephorus was?

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ZOE: What! timid and confused, you haven't dared
To sustain an interview with a father and a lover?
Ah, madame, could you secretly feel
An unjust repentance over this fatal departure?

IRENE: Me!

ZOE: Often the danger whose image we brave
Astonishes courage at the moment of its approach.
Terrified nature and our secret inclinations
Are awakened in us, stronger and more powerful.

IRENE: No, I haven't changed; I am still the same
I'm abandoning myself completely to my father who loves me.
It's true, in this fatal moment, I haven't been able
To withstand the looks of a father and a lover.
I couldn't speak, trembling, fainting,
The day refused my obscure sight.
My blood was frozen; without strength and without help
I was reaching the moment that would end my life.
Shall I render thanks to the hands which helped me?
Shall I withstand the life, alas! that they returned to me?
If Leonce appears I feel my tears spill,
If I see Alexis, I shake and I die.
And I would like to hide from all nature
My feelings, my fear and the ills I am enduring
Ah! what's Alexis doing?

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

ZOE: He intends as sovereign
To place you back on the throne and to give you his hand.
To Leonce, to the pontiff, he's explaining himself as master.
In these distractions I have trouble knowing him.
He won't suffer that you ever dare
To dispose of yourself and leave the palace.

IRENE: Heaven, you read in my heart, you see my sacrifice
You will not suffer that I be his accomplice!

ZOE: How you are in prey to sad battles!

IRENE: You know them: pity me, don't condemn me.
All that can tempt a weak mortal
To punish herself and to reign over herself
I have done, you know it; I still carry my weeping
To God whose goodness, they say, changes hearts.
He has not harkened to my assiduous complaints
He pushes away my hands extended towards his throne
He distances himself.

ZOE: And still, free in your sorrows,
You are fleeing your lover.

IRENE: Perhaps, I cannot.

ZOE: I see you are resisting the flame that devours you.

IRENE: By wanting to suffocate it, could I be reigniting it still?

ZOE: Alexis won't live and reign except for you.

IRENE: No, Alexis will never be my spouse.

ZOE: Well, if in Greece a barbarous custom
Contrary to those of Rome, unworthily separates
The widows of Caesars from the rest of mankind
If this harsh prejudice reigns in our ramparts,
This rigorous law is it a supreme command
That from the height of his throne was pronounced by God himself?
Against you does he intend to arm himself with his lightning?

IRENE: Yes: you see what mortal he forbids me to love.

ZOE: Thus, far from the palace where you were nourished
You are going, beautiful Irene, to inter your life!

IRENE: I don't know where I am going Humans, weak humans!
Do we control our fate? Is it in our hands?

(Enter Leonce.)

ACT IV

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

LEONCE: Daughter, you must follow me and flee rapidly
This odious abode, fatal to innocence.
Cease to fear and follow on my steps,
The efforts of tyrants that a father doesn't fear.
Against these famous names of augustus and invincible,
A word, a name from heaven, is a terrible weapon
And religion, which commands them all,
Puts in them a holy bridle that
Brings them to their knees repenting.
My hair shirt, that a prince contemplates with disdain
Triumphs over his purple, and commands him to the temple.
Your honors, more sure and more constant with me
Will be independent of flighty humans.
They won't have need to strike the vulgar
With the dazzle borrowed from a foreign pomp.
You've already learned what to disdain;
You are going to reign far from the throne.

IRENE: I've already told you, I am quitting it without regret.
The new Caesar is coming; I'm leaving and avoiding him.

(She leaves.)

LEONCE: I won't leave you.

ALEXIS: (entering) That's too much; stop
For the last time, unjust father, listen.
Hear your master to whom blood binds you
And who has lavished his life for your daughter.
Who has delivered you both from a tyrant,
This unhappy conqueror that you are making desperate.
The sovereign, sacred to the altars of Sophia
Whose high cabal is tied to yours
You are seconding against me, and think with impunity
In the name of heaven, to ravish Irene from her lover.
I've served all of you, you, Irene, and Byzantium.
Your daughter was the just reward for it,
The only prize owing to my arm, to my faith
The only object that may be, in the end, worthy of me.
My heart is open to you and you know if I love.
You are coming to carry away from me half of myself.
You who, from the cradle united the two of us
With a paternal hand formed our bonds;
You, by whom she was promised to me so many times,
You are ravishing her from me, when I've conquered her.
After I saved her, and you, and the whole realm!
Too virtuous mortal, you are an ingrate.
You dare to propose that my heart detach itself from her!
Giver her to me, cruel man, or I will tear her from you!
Embrace a tender son, born to cherish you
Or beware an avenger armed to punish you.

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

LEONCE: Be neither the one nor the other, and try to be just.

Rapidly carried to this august throne
Deserve your success Hear me, lord:
I can neither flatter nor fear an emperor.
I didn't leave my profound retreat
To deliver my old age to worldly intrigues
To great passions, to their distracted desires.
I can only announce harsh truths.
Who serves only his God has nothing else to say.
I am speaking to you in his name and in the name of the Empire.
You are blind; I must reveal to you
The crime and the dangers you intend to run.
Know that on earth, there's no place,
Or ferocious nation by the world abhorred,
From a clime so savage, where a mortal ever
With such a sacrilege dared to soil the altar.
Hear God who speaks and the earth which screams:
Your hands have torn the life from your monarch.
Don't marry his widow. Or, if you dare
To disdain the eternal laws of this voice
Go rape my daughter and try to please her,
Stained by the blood of a husband and that of a father:
Strike

ALEXIS: (turning away) I cannot do it and despite my wrath

This heart you are piercing is softened for you.
Is the harshness of yours unalterable?
Do you see in me only a culpable enemy?
And will you regret your persecutor
To raise your voice against a liberator?
Tender father of Irene, alas! be my father;
Relinquish the role of a pitiless judge.
Don't sacrifice your daughter and me
To superstitions whose law you serve;
Don't make an odious and cruel weapon of them.
And don't force them with a paternal hand
Into the unhappy heart that wants to revere you,
And which your virtue is pleased to tear apart.
Such severity is not in nature
Abandon the imposture of a terrible prejudice
Cease

LEONCE: In what error is your spirit plunging itself?

Is the voice of the universe a prejudice?

ALEXIS: You argue, Leonce, and as for me, I am sensitive.

LEONCE: I am like you heaven is inflexible.

ALEXIS: You are making it speak, you are forcing me, cruel man

To battle my father and heaven at the same time.

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

More blood is going to be shed for this unjust Irene
Than shed for Roman ambition.
The hand that saved you can no longer
Do anything but avenge itself.
I will destroy this temple where they dare to outrage me.
I will smash the altar defended by your yourself.
This altar at all times rival of the crown;
This fatal instrument of so many passions,
Loaded by our ancestors with the gold of nations,
Cemented by their blood, surrounded by rapines.
Ingrate, you will see me on these vast ruins
Light the torches of a marriage they reprove
In the midst of debris, of blood, of tombs.

LEONCE: Now there are the horrors in which supreme grandeur
That is without bridle, is abandoning itself!
I pity you for reigning.

ALEXIS: I am getting carried away;
I feel it, I blush for it, but your cruelty
Calm in striking me, studiously barbarous
Insults with more art, and carries a most rough blow.
Withdraw; flee.

LEONCE: I will await, lord,
What justice brings me and tells your heart.

ALEXIS: No, don't wait: decide immediately
If I must avenge myself or if I must die.

LEONCE:
Here's my blood, I tell you, and I am offering it to your blows.
Respect my duty; it is stronger than you are.

(Leonce leaves.)

ALEXIS: How happy is his fate! seated on the shore
He looks in pity on this turbulent storm
Which has begun the course of my sad reign.
Irene is the charm and the horror of my life.
Her weakness is sacrificing me to the errors of her father.
To the senseless speeches of a vulgar blind man.
Those in whom I was hoping are all my enemies.
I'm Caesar, I'm in love, and nothing is submissive to me!
What! Without blushing, I can, in fields of carnage
When a Scyth, a German succumbs to my courage
Over his completely bloody corpse that they bring to my eyes
Carry off his spouse in the sight of the gods
Without a priest, a soldier daring to raise his head!
No one dares to suspect the right of my conquest
And my fellow citizens will forbid me to love

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

The widow of a tyrant who wanted to oppress her!
Let's enter. (enter Zoe)
Well, Zoe, what have you come to inform me of?

ZOE: In her apartment beware of entering.
Leonce and the pontiff are dismayed her heart.
Their holy and funereal voices bring terror to it;
Shivering at their feet, trembling, fainting
Our sad efforts barely recalled her life.
They are daring to snatch her from the walls of this palace.
A sad retreat will forever hide
Abandoned Irene from the rest of the earth.
Such is the destiny of widows of Caesars.
They see in you only a furious tyrant
A sacrilegious soldier, an enemy of the heavens,
If, wishing to abolish these sinister customs,
You brave the ministers of religion.
The empress in tears, conjures you on her knees
Not to listen to an imprudent wrath
And to allow her to fulfill these deplorable duties
That sacred masters judge inviolable.

ALEXIS: Masters where I am! I thought not to have any more.
To me, guards, come.

(Enter Memnon and guards.)

ALEXIS: My absolute orders
Are that no mortal leave this enclosure
That they be armed everywhere, and that this gate be watched.
Go. They will learn who gives the law
Which of us is Caesar, the pontiff or me.
Dear Zoe, return, inform Irene
That she must obey and that she must bear it in mind.
(to Memnon; Zoe leaves)
Friend, it's with you today, that I am undertaking
To smash in one day all the fetters of tyrants.
Nicephorus is fallen: let's drive out those that remain.
These mental tyrants that my pains detest,
Let Irene's father be arrested in the palace.
Having, in the end, less authority and less audacity;
Let him be distanced from his daughter and reduced to silence.
He shall not raise the populace of Byzantium.
Let this passionate pontiff be guarded in the palace.
Another more submissive to my order is mandated
Who will be more docile to my sovereign voice.
Constantine, Theodosius found them without trouble
More criminal than I in their sad abode.
Their cruelty lacked the excuse of love.

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

MEMNON: Caesar, what are you thinking of? this intractable old geezer
Opinionated, high born, is still respectable.
He is of those virtues, forced to esteem
We tremble to oppress even while detesting them.
Eh! don't you fear by this violence
To do the heart of Irene a mortal offense?

ALEXIS: No, I've decided on it. I owe it to my grandeur.
And my throne, and my glory it lacks happiness.
I am succumbing, in reigning, to destiny which outrages me.
Second my distractions, finish your work.

CURTAIN

ACT V

MEMNON: Yes, sometimes, no question, it is most difficult
To assure for oneself a pure and easy fate
As to find glory in the midst of battle
Which depends less on us than on our soldiers.
I told you: Irene in her just wrath
Will never pardon the outrage on her father.

ALEXIS: But what! to allow an imperious master near her
Who will reproach her for the power of her eyes,
Who will especially make it a crime to please me
And twisting at his will this simple and sincere heart
Govern her weakness and deceive her candor
Is going to change by degrees her tenderness into horror!
I intend to reign over her as well as over Byzantium.
To cover her with the rays of my total-power
And this proud master, who intends to give her the law
Shall be at the feet of his daughter and serve her with me.

MEMNON: You are deceiving yourself, Caesar; I've foreseen your alarms
You've turned your own arms against you.
It's done; I pity you.

ALEXIS: You've obeyed me?

MEMNON: With regret; but I've served you.
I seized the old geezer; and Caesar who is sighing
With the weakness of love is teaching me what empire is.
But after this injury, would you have hoped
To draw to you an ulcerated spirit?
Eh! why consult in such alarms
An old soldier gone white in the horrors of fighting?

ALEXIS: Ah! dear and wise friend, how your enlightened eyes
Have indeed foreseen the effect of my distracted desires!

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

How you know this heart so contrary to itself,
Rebel slave that ruins all it loves;
Blind in its wrath, prompt to contradict itself
Born for passions and to repent them!

(Memnon leaves.)

ALEXIS: Come, come, Zoe, you who cherish Irene; (Zoe enters)

Judge if my love has deserved her hate.
If I wished as master, as conqueror, as Caesar
To display the august Irene chained to my chariot.
I would never order such an odious celebration
At the temple of the Bosphorus being prepared with pomp.
I won't insult to this degree these prejudices
That the times implant in the heart of nations.
I intend to prepare this marriage to which I aspire
Far from an importunate populace attracted by a vain spectacle.
You know the altar raised in these parts
With the simplicity of the hands of our ancestors.
Only admitting for witnesses of the faith that is pledged,
Two friends, a priest and heaven that forgives.
It's there that before God, I will promise my heart.
Is it unworthy of her? does it inspire horror?
From pity, tell me if her agitated soul
Recoils in shock from offers that I am making.
If my profound respect can only revolt her:
Finally, if I am offending her in making her reign.

ZOE: This morning, I admit, in prey to her alarms
Your name spoken made her tears flow.
But since Leonce spoke to you here
Eye fixed, face pale, and mind overwhelmed
She keeps a wild silence with us.
Her heart doesn't make us a sad confidence
Of this powerful remorse which battles her desires.
Her eyes have no more tears, or her voice sighs
Profoundly struck by her last affront,
By Leonce and you completely occupied,
She has not responded to our urgings
Except with a dying regard and a distracted face;
Unable to repulse from her somber thoughts
The dolorous weight which oppresses her.

ALEXIS: Alas! she loves you and no doubt fears me.
If in my despair your friendship pities me
If you can move much in this noble and tender heart
Decide her at least to see me, to hear me,
Not to reject these humiliated prayers
From an emperor, submissive and trembling at her feet.
The conqueror of Caesar is Irene's slave.
She extends at her choice or shakes off her chain:

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

Let her say but a single word.

ZOE: Right in this abode

I see her coming by the secret passage.

ALEXIS: It's she herself, o heaven!

ZOE Attached to the earth

Her view at the sight of us is distracted wildly.

She's hurrying towards us, but without looking at you.

I don't know what horror seems to possess her.

ALEXIS: Irene, is it really you? What! far from answering me

She hardly intends to confound me with a look.

(One of the soldiers who is accompanying her brings up a chair.)

IRENE: (entering) A seat I'm succumbing In these isolated parts

Attend me, soldiers. Alexis, listen. (with an uneven voice, halting but firm more than sad)

Know what I am suffering, and seeing what I dare,

You will grasp the reason for such a conversation,

And it will soon be known if I ought to have spoken to you.

With a great enough reproach I can overwhelm you,

But the excess of misfortune weakens anger.

Tainted with the blood of a husband,

You are taking a father from me.

You are seeking to raise against you again

This empire and heaven that you are daring to brave.

I see the distraction of your frightful delirium

With that pity that a frenzy inspires.

And I am coming to you only to pull you back

From the depth of the abyss in which I see you entering.

I pity your blind funereal sense

It cannot be cured a sole role remains to me.

Go seek my father, implore his pardon

Come back with him, perhaps reason,

Duty, friendship, the interest which ties us together,

The voice of blood which speaks from his tenderized soul,

Will bring closer three hearts which are not in accord.

A moment can end so many sad battles.

Go bring me the virtuous Leonce;

On my fate with you let his mouth pronounce.

Can I count on it?

ALEXIS: I am running without examining anything.

Ah! if I dared to think that he could pardon me

I would die at your feet from an excess of joy.

I fly blindly where your order sends me.

I am going to repair everything, yes, despite his rigors,

I intend that with my hand his hand dry your tears.

Irene, believe me. my life is destined

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

To make you forget this frightful day.
You tenderized father will see in me
Only a tender and submissive son, worthy of your faith.
If in Thrace much blood was shed for you
My outpoured blessings will cover their trace.
If I offended Leonce, he will see the whole realm
Expiate with me this unworthy outrage.
The two of you will reign, my tenderness only aspires
To leave the reigns of empire in his hands.
I am swearing it to the heroes with whom we won the day,
And to heaven that hears me, and you, and my love.

IRENE: (softening, and holding back her tears)

Go: have pity of this unfortunate.
Heaven tore her from you; for you she was born.
Go, prince.

ALEXIS: Ah! great God, witness of my blessings,
I will be worthy yet of my happiness.

IRENE: Go! (he leaves)

Follow his steps, Zoe, so faithful and dear.

(Zoe leaves.)

IRENE: (rising)

What have I said? What have I done? and is it what I am hoping?
I no longer know myself While he was speaking to me
At only the sound of his voice all my heart escaped from me.
Each word, each moment brought into my wound
Devouring poisons which made nature shiver. (she walks dazed and beside herself)
No, don't obey me, no my dear Alexis,
Don't bring my father to my obscure eyes.
Return Ah! I see you: Ah! I hear you.
Near you I idolize the crime.
O crime! get away Heaven! what a frightful object!
What threatening specter is hurling itself between the two of us!
Is it you, Nicephorus! Terrible shade, halt!
Pour out only my blood, strike only my head.
I alone did it all; it's my guilty love,
It's I who betrayed you, who stole life from you.
What! you are joining with him, you my unhappy father!
You pursue this homicidal, adulterous daughter!
Flee, my dear Alexis, turn away with horror
Those eyes so dangerous so powerful to my heart!
Disengage from my hand, your hand reeking with blood.
My father and my spouse are pursuing your lover!
On their embloodied bodies will you make me march
To fly into your arms from those you've torn me?
Ah! I'm coming to myself Sacred religion,
Duty, nature, honor, to this distracted soul

IRENE By VOLTAIRE

You are returning her reason, you are calming her spirits.
I no longer hear you, if I see Alexis!
God, that I wish to serve, and that I am still outraging,
Why have you delivered me to this cruel storm?
Against a weak reed why do you want to arm yourself?
What have I done? You know; my whole crime is to love!
Despite my repentance, despite your supreme law
You see that my lover has won despite yourself.
He reigns, he has conquered you in my obscure feelings.
Well! behold my heart! that's where Alexis is
Yes, so long as I breathe he's the sole master of it.
I feel that by adoring him I am going to deny you.
I am betraying marriage, nature and you

(Irene draws a dagger and strikes herself. Enter Alexis, Leonce, Memnon and followers.)

ALEXIS: I am bringing you a father and I've flattered myself
That we can soften his harsh austerity;
That his justice in the end will find me less culpable.
He will deign Just heaven! what a horrifying spectacle!
Irene, darling Irene!

LEONCE: O my daughter! O madness!

ALEXIS: (throwing himself at Irene's knees)
What demon inspired you?

IRENE: (to Alexis) My love. (to Leonce) Your honor.
I adored Alexis and I am punishing myself for it.

(Alexis wants to kill himself. Memnon stops him.)

LEONCE: Ah! my funereal zeal was too barbarous.

IRENE: (extending her hands)
Remember me the two of you pity my fate.
Heaven! take care of Alexis and pardon my death.

ALEXIS: (on his knees on one side) Irene! Irene! ah, God!

LEONCE: (on his knees at the other side of her) Wretched victim!

IRENE: Pardon, clement God! Is my death a crime?

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CURTAIN

VOLTAIRE: Her last act being an act of contrition, it is clear that she is saved.