

ACT I
SCENE 1

Hippolytus, Theramenes

HIPPOLYTUS

It is decided. I will go from here,
Leave this agreeable shore, Theramenes,
And leave Troezen. With everything in doubt
I am ashamed to be doing nothing.
It is six months since I saw my father,
I do not know what has befallen him,
Nor even where his dear head may lie.

5

THERAMENES

Where then, sir, are you going to look for him?
In an attempt to pacify your fears
I have scoured the seas on both sides of Corinth;
Asked after Theseus upon those shores
Where Acheron disappears among the dead;*
I have been to Elis and, passing Tenaros,
Visited the sea into which Icarus fell.*
What fresh hope have you, in what happy lands
Do you expect to find a trace of him?
Who knows, can we be sure the king your father
Wants us to know the secret of his absence?
May it not be that, while we fear for him,
He's calmly hiding some new love from us
And waiting for some unfortunate girl to . . .

10

15

20

HIPPOLYTUS

Enough of that, Theramenes, and speak
Respectfully of Theseus! There were errors,
Certainly, in his youth, but for the future
We can be sure he will not err again;
Phaedra has long settled his affections
And has no fear of any rivals now.
So I shall look for him, it is my duty,
This place is now impossible, I shall leave.

25

THERAMENES

How long, sir, have you been afraid to stay
 In this place where everything is so peaceful
 And where you were so happy as a child;
 Where I have seen you better pleased to be
 Than in the splendour of the court at Athens?
 What danger or what trouble drives you out?

HIPPOLYTUS

That happy time has gone and all has changed
 Since the gods sent upon this coast of ours
 The daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë.*

THERAMENES

I understand. The cause of your distress
 Is known to me; that Phaedra should be here
 Troubles you and the sight of her is wounding.
 A dangerous stepmother, her influence showed
 The moment that she set her eyes on you
 And without more ado she had you exiled.
 But now her hatred's gone or has grown less.
 Besides, how can a woman who is dying
 And wants to die, be any threat to you?
 Phaedra is suffering and will not say why;
 Tired of herself and of the air she breathes,
 Can she plot anything against you now?

HIPPOLYTUS

It is not her hostility I fear.
 I leave her to escape another enemy.
 I am escaping from the young Aricia,
 Last of a race sworn to our destruction.

THERAMENES

But, sir, you are not persecuting her?
 Did this young lady, though she was the sister
 Of the cruel sons of Pallas, ever meddle
 With the designs of her perfidious brothers?
 Should you hate her? Her charms are innocent.

HIPPOLYTUS

If I hated her I would not run away.

I. 1

THERAMENES

Sir, may I guess the reason for your flight?
 Can it be that the proud Hippolytus,
 Implacable against the laws of love
 And the yoke Theseus has so often borne,
 Is so no longer? Can it be that Venus 65
 Wants to show Theseus was right after all?
 That she is treating you like other mortals
 And forcing you to worship at her shrine.
 Could you be in love, sir?

HIPPOLYTUS

How dare you, friend?
 You have known me since the day I was born; 70
 How can you ask me shamefully to give up
 The haughty pride you know is in my heart?
 An Amazon was my mother and I sucked*
 That pride in with her milk—but that is nothing;
 When I arrived at riper years myself 75
 I could not but approve the self I found.
 You were then my attached and zealous tutor,
 Accustomed to recount my father's story.
 You knew with what attention I would listen
 And how I warmed to all his noble deeds, 80
 When you described this intrepid hero
 Who consoled men for losing Hercules,*
 Told me of monsters strangled, brigands punished,
 Procrustes, Cercyon, of Scirron and Sinnis,
 The giant's bones scattered at Epidaurus, 85
 And all Crete reeking of the Minotaur's blood.
 But, when you touched upon less glorious deeds,
 His troth plighted in a hundred places,
 Helen in Sparta stolen from her parents,* 90
 Salamis witnessing Periboea's tears,
 So many others, whose names he forgot,
 Too credulous, betrayed by his flame;
 As Ariadne, complaining to the rocks;
 Phaedra too taken, under better auspices; 95
 You know with what regret I heard such talk,
 Begging you many times to cut it short.
 Happy had I been able to erase

The unworthy half of this fine history! I. 1
 And is it now my turn to be so bound?
 And would the gods so far have humbled me,
 The more contemptible in my weak sighs 100
 In that while Theseus might be excused
 For all the heap of honours he has earned
 I cannot claim I have tamed any monsters
 Which might give me the right to fail like him. 105
 Even suppose my pride had been diminished
 Should I have chosen Aricia as the instrument?
 My straying senses could not but remember
 The obstacle which stands between us two.
 My father disapproves of her and prohibits 110
 A union that would give his brother nephews:
 He fears a shoot sprung from a guilty stock
 And wants the name extinguished with their sister;
 She is to be his ward until she dies
 And in the meantime she is not to marry. 115
 Should I take sides with her against my father?
 Is it for me to set such an example?
 And my youth, launched upon a reckless love . . .

THERAMENES

Ah, but if once your hour has struck, my lord,
 Heaven will not give a thought to our reasons. 120
 Theseus, trying to close your eyes, has opened them;
 His hatred fans the flame of rebellion
 And gives fresh graces to his enemy.
 So why resist an innocent affection?
 If it has charms, why not give way to it? 125
 Is a wild scruple always to be followed?
 Hercules strayed, and should you fear to do so?
 Who has not in the end been tamed by Venus?
 Where would you be yourself, you who resist her,
 If Antiope had not relented, 130
 Consumed by a chaste love for Theseus?
 But does all this proud talk serve any purpose?
 Admit it, everything's different; these last days
 You have not been the same Hippolytus,
 The wild and unapproachable young man 135
 Driving a chariot along the shore

Or, expert in the art Neptune invented,
 Boldly riding a stallion from the herd.
 We have not been hallooing in the woods,
 A hidden fire has made your eyes less keen. 140
 No doubt about it, you must be in love:
 You're pining and you will not tell us why.
 Can it be that you find Aricia charming?

HIPPOLYTUS

Theramenes, I'm off to find my father.

THERAMENES

Will you not see Phaedra before you go,
 My lord? 145

HIPPOLYTUS

Of course, let her know I am coming.
 We'll see her, for I must be dutiful.
 But here comes the queen's dear Oenone;
 What fresh misfortune is disturbing her?

SCENE 2

Hippolytus, Oenone, Theramenes

OENONE

Who has more reason than I to be disturbed? 150
 Oh my lord, the queen is on her death-bed.
 Night and day I spend myself watching her;
 She is dying in my arms and will not say why.
 Her mind is eternally in disorder.
 Her bed cannot hold her in her restless grief. 155
 She must be in the light; in her great pain
 She will have me keep everyone away ...
 She's coming.

HIPPOLYTUS

That's it. I must be off
 So that she does not see a face she hates.

SCENE 3

Phaedra, Oenone

PHAEDRA

Let's go no further, but stop here, Oenone.
 I cannot manage for my strength has gone;
 Seeing the light again dazzles my eyes
 And my knees tremble and are giving way.
 Oh dear!

160

[She sits down.]

OENONE

Almighty gods, may our tears appease you!

165

PHAEDRA

How heavy they seem, these ornaments, these veils!
 Whose hand, unasked, has tied up all these knots,
 Has carefully set my hair about my forehead?
 Everything hurts and conspires to do me harm.

OENONE

How your wishes conflict with one another!
 It was you who, a little while ago,
 Denounced your own intentions as unjust
 And urged me to put all your finery on;
 It was you, with your former strength in mind,
 Who wanted to be seen, and see the light:
 You see it, ma'am, and now you want to hide;
 Do you now hate the light you were looking for?

170

175

PHAEDRA

Noble and brilliant author of a sad family,
 You whose daughter my mother dared claim to be,
 Who perhaps redden with shame at my distress,
 O Sun, this is the last time I shall see you!

180

OENONE

What! you still entertain that cruel longing?
 Must I still see you giving up hope of life?
 Is it for death you make these preparations?

PHAEDRA

Gods! if I could rest in a dark forest!
 When shall I, through a cloud of noble dust,
 Watch a chariot disappear in the distance?

185

1.3

OENONE

What, ma'am?

PHAEDRA

I am mad! Oh, where am I?

What have I said? My mind is wandering.
Gone then! the gods have left me desolate.
Oenone, my face is covered with blushes;
You can see what I suffer from too clearly;
Do what I will, my eyes fill with tears.

190

OENONE

If you must blush, blush because you are silent
And so exacerbate your violent ills.
Must you refuse our care, be deaf to our words
And proceed pitilessly to your death?
What fury stops your life in mid-course?
What spell or poison has dried up its spring?
Three times darkness has overspread the sky
Since last your eyes admitted trace of sleep,
And day has three times chased off the dark night
Since any food entered your weakened body.
I beg you, do not let yourself be tempted:
What right have you to try to kill yourself?
You offend the gods from whom your life proceeds;
You betray the husband to whom you gave your word;
You betray your children to a long unhappiness
Under a tutelage which must be rigorous.
Consider, on the day they lose their mother
The foreigner's son will be given fresh hope,
Your proud enemy, the enemy of your race,
This son once carried in an Amazon's womb,
Hippolytus, this . . .

195

200

205

210

PHAEDRA

Gods!

OENONE

That gives you pause?

PHAEDRA

Unhappy woman, what name have you uttered?

215

OENONE

Ah, now you have reason to be angry.
 I like to see you shudder at that name.
 Then live. Let love and duty have their way.
 Live and you will not let a Scythian's son
 Assume a crushing sway over your children,
 The best blood of Greece and of the gods.
 But do not let time pass, for time is mortal.
 Recruit your wasted strength, do it at once
 While there is still a flicker of life in you;
 Fan it at least, before it goes out.

13

220

PHAEDRA

My fault is, I have lived too long already.

225

OENONE

Is it remorse tearing you apart?
 What crime can make it so unrelenting?
 Your hands have not dabbled in innocent blood.

PHAEDRA

Thank heaven, my hands are not criminal.
 If only my heart were as innocent!

230

OENONE

What project did you form within yourself
 So frightful that your heart is still terrified?

PHAEDRA

I have said enough already. Spare me now.
 I am dying because to confess would be death.

235

OENONE

Then die, persist in your inhuman silence,
 But look for someone else to close your eyes.
 Although your flickering life is almost done,
 My spirit will be first among the dead
 Who always beckon us a thousand ways;
 My grief entitles me to take the shortest.
 You are so cruel! When have you found me fail you?
 I left country and children for your sake.
 Is this how you reward my devotion?

240

PHAEDRA

Why be so violent? What good will it do?
 It will appal you if I break my silence.

245

I. 3

OENONE

Great gods, can anything you have to say
Be worse than you dying before my eyes?

PHAEDRA

If I confessed my crime, and if you knew
What lot the Fates have meted out to me,
I should still die, and die more culpable.

250

OENONE

I beg you by the tears I shed for you,
And by the feeble limbs that I embrace,
Deliver my mind from this fatal doubt.

PHAEDRA

It is your wish: get up.

OENONE

Speak, I am listening.

255

PHAEDRA

What can I say to her, heavens? How begin?

OENONE

It is your terrors which affront me most.

PHAEDRA

Venus hates me! Her anger is fatal!
To what confusions did love lead my mother!

OENONE

Let us not think of them, ma'am: for the future
Eternal silence cover the remembrance.

260

PHAEDRA

My sister Ariadne, you were caught*
And died where Theseus had abandoned you!

OENONE

What is it, ma'am? What disturbs you so,
Setting you against your own flesh and blood?

265

PHAEDRA

I am the last of that deplorable race;
Since Venus wishes it, I die the last of them
And the unhappiest.

OENONE

Are you in love?

PHAEDRA

I suffer all the furies love can bring.

L 3

OENONE

For whom?

PHAEDRA

Now you will hear the full horror.
I love . . . I tremble and shiver at the name.
I love . . .

270

OENONE

Who?

PHAEDRA

You know the Amazon's son,
This prince I have for so long oppressed.

OENONE

Hippolytus! Great gods!

PHAEDRA

It was you named him.

OENONE

Just heavens! All my blood runs cold, it freezes.
Despair! Crime! A deplorable race!
Why did we come here? Shores of ill omen,
Were we obliged to make this fatal journey?

275

PHAEDRA

My trouble comes from further back. No sooner
Had I become the wife of Theseus,
Contentment, happiness seemed well assured,
Then Athens showed me my proud enemy.
I saw him: I blushed and grew pale seeing him;
Then in my mind, what turbulence arose!
My eyes were blinded and I could not speak;
I felt my whole body grow hot and cold.
I recognized the terrible fires of Venus,
Torments inevitable in a race she persecutes.
I was assiduous in all the vows
I thought would placate and deflect her:
I built a temple to her, decorated it;
At all times I had victims for sacrifice
And hoped by stabbing them to find my reason:

280

285

290

That was no remedy for invincible love!
 In vain my hand burnt incense at the altars; 295
 But all the time my lips implored the goddess,
 My adoration was for Hippolytus;
 He was always there, even when the altars smoked
 It was to him, this god I dared not name,
 I offered everything. I avoided him, 300
 The worst torture of all! My eyes saw him
 Even in the features of his father.
 I had the courage to go against myself
 And forced myself at last to persecute him.
 To banish the enemy I idolized 305
 I pretended the injustice of a stepmother;
 For ever calling out for his exile,
 I tore him from the arms of his father.
 I breathed at last, Oenone, once he was absent,
 My days were less troubled; they were innocent: 310
 I concealed my grief: obedient to my husband
 I cosseted the children of our marriage.
 My precautions were vain. By cruel fate
 My husband himself brought me to Troezene:
 The enemy that I had banished was there 315
 And my too recent wound began to bleed.
 No longer is it a secret fire in my veins;
 It is Venus motionless upon her prey.
 I have a proper terror of my crime;
 I hate life and my love horrifies me; 320
 Dying, I wanted to keep my good name
 And not let my dark love into the light:
 Your tears were too much for me, and you fought me;
 I have confessed: I do not regret it
 So long as you, seeing me so near death, 325
 No longer hurt me with unjust reproaches
 And make no further effort to revive
 The last faint warmth now ready to depart.

SCENE 4

Phaedra, Oenone, Panope

PANOPE

I have sad news that I should wish to hide
 From you, ma'am, but my duty is to tell it.
 Death has removed your invincible lord
 And you alone are not informed of it.

330

OENONE

What are you saying, Panope?

PANOPE

That the queen

Now prays in vain for Theseus' return,
 And that his son Hippolytus has been told
 By ships just in to port, that he is dead.

335

PHAEDRA

Heavens!

PANOPE

Athens is divided; one party
 Thinks that the prince your son should be king;
 The other, ma'am, so far forgets the laws
 As to give its suffrage to the foreigner's son.
 It is even said that an insolent faction
 Designs to put Aricia on the throne
 And so to let the race of Pallas triumph.
 I thought that I should warn you of this danger.
 Already Hippolytus is about to go;
 The fear is that if he shows himself
 In the midst of this confusion, all the crowd,
 Fickle as usual, will adhere to him.

340

345

OENONE

Enough said, Panope. The queen hears you
 And she will see the warning is important.

350

SCENE 5

Phaedra, Oenone

OENONE

Ma'am, my persuasions were at an end,
 I was no longer urging you to live
 And thought rather of following you to the tomb,
 No longer having the heart to keep you from it;
 But this fresh trouble calls for other counsels. 355
 Your fortune changes and looks different now.
 The king has gone, ma'am, you must take his place.
 His death leaves you a son to whom you are bound,
 A slave if he loses you, if you live, a king.
 In his misfortune, to whom can he turn? 360
 Where will the hand be that should dry his tears?
 His innocent cries, reaching up to heaven,
 Will rouse his divine ancestors against you.
 Live, you need not reprove yourself further:
 Your love becomes an ordinary love, 365
 For by his death Theseus has cut the bonds
 Which made a crime, a horror, of your passion.
 You have less to fear now from Hippolytus;
 It is not culpable to see him now.
 Convinced of your aversion, it is possible 370
 He will consent to lead the sedition.
 Put him right, and make his courage falter.
 He is king here, Troezene falls to him,
 But he knows that the law will give your son
 The superb ramparts that Minerva built.* 375
 Both of you have a natural enemy:
 You should combine against Aricia.

PHAEDRA

Well, I will let myself be influenced
 By your advice and will consent to live,
 If anyone can bring me back to life 380
 And if love of a son, in this dark moment,
 Can revive the poor remnant of my spirits.