

Aaron the Moor

Some Key Exchanges

ACT II, Scene i

Aaron. Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,
Safe out of fortune's shot; and sits aloft,
Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash;
Advanced above pale envy's threatening reach.
As when the golden sun salutes the morn,
And, having gilt the ocean with his beams,
Gallops the zodiac in his glistening coach,
And overlooks the highest-peering hills;
So Tamora:
Upon her wit doth earthly honour wait,
And virtue stoops and trembles at her frown.
Then, Aaron, arm thy heart, and fit thy thoughts,
To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress,
And mount her pitch, whom thou in triumph long
Hast prisoner held, fetter'd in amorous chains
And faster bound to Aaron's charming eyes
Than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus.
Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts!
I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold,
To wait upon this new-made empress.
To wait, said I? to wanton with this queen,
This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,
This siren, that will charm Rome's Saturnine,
And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's.

ACT II, Scene i

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

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

Chiron. Aaron, a thousand deaths

Would I propose to achieve her whom I love.

Aaron. To achieve her! how?

Demetrius. Why makest thou it so strange?
She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd;
She is a woman, therefore may be won;
She is Lavinia, therefore must be loved.
What, man! more water glideth by the mill
Than wots the miller of; and easy it is
Of a cut loaf to steal a shive, we know:
Though Bassianus be the emperor's brother.
Better than he have worn Vulcan's badge.

Aaron. [Aside] Ay, and as good as Saturninus may.

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

Aaron. Why, then, it seems, some certain snatch or so
Would serve your turns.

Demetrius. Aaron, thou hast hit it.

Aaron. Would you had hit it too!
Then should not we be tired with this ado.
Why, hark ye, hark ye! and are you such fools
To square for this? would it offend you, then
That both should speed?

Demetrius. Nor me, so I were one.

Aaron. For shame, be friends, and join for that you jar:
'Tis policy and stratagem must do
That you affect; and so must you resolve,
That what you cannot as you would achieve,

You must perforce accomplish as you may.
Take this of me: Lucrece was not more chaste
Than this Lavinia, Bassianus' love.
A speedier course than lingering languishment
Must we pursue, and I have found the path.
My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand;
There will the lovely Roman ladies troop:
The forest walks are wide and spacious;
And many unfrequented plots there are
Fitted by kind for rape and villany:
Single you thither then this dainty doe,
And strike her home by force, if not by words:
This way, or not at all, stand you in hope.
Come, come, our empress, with her sacred wit
To villany and vengeance consecrate,
Will we acquaint with all that we intend;
And she shall file our engines with advice,
That will not suffer you to square yourselves,
But to your wishes' height advance you both.
The emperor's court is like the house of Fame,
The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears:
The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull;
There speak, and strike, brave boys, and take
your turns;
There serve your lusts, shadow'd from heaven's eye,
And revel in Lavinia's treasury.

ACT III, Scene i

[Enter AARON]

Aaron. Titus Andronicus, my lord the emperor
Sends thee this word,—that, if thou love thy sons,
Let Marcus, Lucius, or thyself, old Titus,
Or any one of you, chop off your hand,
And send it to the king: he for the same
Will send thee hither both thy sons alive;
And that shall be the ransom for their fault.

Marcus Andronicus. Which of your hands hath not
defended Rome,
And rear'd aloft the bloody battle-axe,
Writing destruction on the enemy's castle?
O, none of both but are of high desert:
My hand hath been but idle; let it serve
To ransom my two nephews from their death;
Then have I kept it to a worthy end.

Aaron. Nay, come, agree whose hand shall go along,
For fear they die before their pardon come.

Titus Andronicus. Come hither, Aaron; I'll deceive them
both:

Lend me thy hand, and I will give thee mine.

Aaron. [Aside] If that be call'd deceit, I will be honest,
And never, whilst I live, deceive men so:
But I'll deceive you in another sort,
And that you'll say, ere half an hour pass.

Titus Andronicus. Now stay your strife: what shall be is
dispatch'd.

Good Aaron, give his majesty my hand:
Tell him it was a hand that warded him
From thousand dangers; bid him bury it
More hath it merited; that let it have.
As for my sons, say I account of them
As jewels purchased at an easy price;
And yet dear too, because I bought mine own.

Aaron. I go, Andronicus: and for thy hand
Look by and by to have thy sons with thee.

[Aside]

Their heads, I mean. O, how this villany
Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it!
Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace.
Aaron will have his soul black like his face.

ACT V, Scene i

[A ladder brought, which AARON is made to ascend]

Aaron. Lucius, save the child,
And bear it from me to the empress.
If thou do this, I'll show thee wondrous things,
That highly may advantage thee to hear:
If thou wilt not, befall what may befall,
I'll speak no more but 'Vengeance rot you all!'

Lucius. Say on: an if it please me which thou speak'st
Thy child shall live, and I will see it nourish'd.

Aaron. An if it please thee! why, assure thee, Lucius,

'Twill vex thy soul to hear what I shall speak;
For I must talk of murders, rapes and massacres,
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Complots of mischief, treason, villainies
Ruthful to hear, yet piteously perform'd:
And this shall all be buried by my death,
Unless thou swear to me my child shall live.

Lucius. Tell on thy mind; I say thy child shall live.

Aaron. Swear that he shall, and then I will begin.

Lucius. Who should I swear by? thou believest no god:

That granted, how canst thou believe an oath?

Aaron. What if I do not? as, indeed, I do not;

Yet, for I know thou art religious

And hast a thing within thee called conscience,

With twenty popish tricks and ceremonies,

Which I have seen thee careful to observe,

Therefore I urge thy oath; for that I know

An idiot holds his bauble for a god

And keeps the oath which by that god he swears,

To that I'll urge him: therefore thou shalt vow

By that same god, what god soe'er it be,

That thou adorest and hast in reverence,

To save my boy, to nourish and bring him up;

Or else I will discover nought to thee.

Lucius. Even by my god I swear to thee I will.

Aaron. First know thou, I begot him on the empress.

Lucius. O most insatiate and luxurious woman!

Aaron. Tut, Lucius, this was but a deed of charity

To that which thou shalt hear of me anon.

'Twas her two sons that murder'd Bassianus;

They cut thy sister's tongue and ravish'd her

And cut her hands and trimm'd her as thou saw'st.

Lucius. O detestable villain! call'st thou that trimming?

Aaron. Why, she was wash'd and cut and trimm'd, and

'twas

Trim sport for them that had the doing of it.

Lucius. O barbarous, beastly villains, like thyself!

Aaron. Indeed, I was their tutor to instruct them:

That coddling spirit had they from their mother,

As sure a card as ever won the set;

That bloody mind, I think, they learn'd of me,

As true a dog as ever fought at head.

Well, let my deeds be witness of my worth.

I train'd thy brethren to that guileful hole

Where the dead corpse of Bassianus lay:

I wrote the letter that thy father found

And hid the gold within the letter mention'd,

Confederate with the queen and her two sons:

And what not done, that thou hast cause to rue,

Wherein I had no stroke of mischief in it?

I play'd the cheater for thy father's hand,

And, when I had it, drew myself apart

And almost broke my heart with extreme laughter:

I pry'd me through the crevice of a wall

When, for his hand, he had his two sons' heads;

Beheld his tears, and laugh'd so heartily,

That both mine eyes were rainy like to his :

And when I told the empress of this sport,

She swooned almost at my pleasing tale,

And for my tidings gave me twenty kisses.

First Goth. What, canst thou say all this, and never blush?

Aaron. Ay, like a black dog, as the saying is.

Lucius. Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?

Aaron. Ay, that I had not done a thousand more.

Even now I curse the day—and yet, I think,

Few come within the compass of my curse,—

Wherein I did not some notorious ill,

As kill a man, or else devise his death,

Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it,

Accuse some innocent and forswear myself,

Set deadly enmity between two friends,

Make poor men's cattle break their necks;

Set fire on barns and hay-stacks in the night,

And bid the owners quench them with their tears.

Oft have I digg'd up dead men from their graves,

And set them upright at their dear friends' doors,

Even when their sorrows almost were forgot;

And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,

Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,

'Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead.'

Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things

As willingly as one would kill a fly,

And nothing grieves me heartily indeed

But that I cannot do ten thousand more.

Lucius. Bring down the devil; for he must not die
So sweet a death as hanging presently.

ACT V, Scene iii

Lucius. Set him breast-deep in earth, and famish him;
There let him stand, and rave, and cry for food;
If any one relieves or pities him,
For the offence he dies. This is our doom:
Some stay to see him fasten'd in the earth.

Aaron. O, why should wrath be mute, and fury dumb?
I am no baby, I, that with base prayers
I should repent the evils I have done:
Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
Would I perform, if I might have my will;
If one good deed in all my life I did,
I do repent it from my very soul.