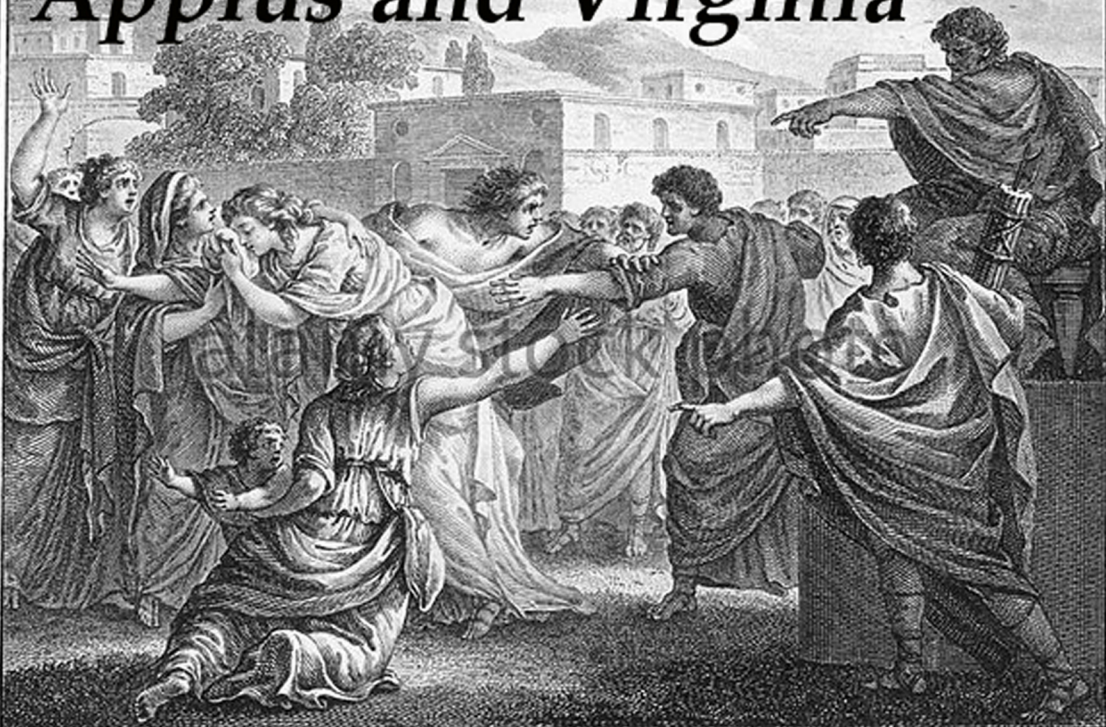


Appius and Virginia



Appius and Virginia

tragedy in five acts after John Webster

by Christian Lanciai (2008)

Dramatis personae (in order of appearance):

Minutius
lictors
Oppius
Appius
Two cousins
Marcus Clodius
Numitorius
Icilius
Virginia
Virginius, her father
soldiers
Valerius
Horatius
Virginia's nurse
Virginia's fool
servants
a lawyer
a tribune

The action is in Rome and its provinces 451-449 B.C.

Copyright © C. Lanciai 2008

Appius and Virginia

Act I scene 1

Minutius Is Appius present, so that we could tell him what the senate has decided?

Lictor He is here, Minutius, and will be present any moment.

Oppius Did you mention to him that our issue is about the senate's resolution?

Lictor I did, and here he is.

(enter Appius with two cousins and Marcus Clodius)

Appius Gentlemen, what is your message?

Minutius The senate greets you, Appius, with the message that you have been elected decemvir.

Appius Be it far from such a humble man as I to aspire to such a title and responsibility, which demands the highest rank and noblest blood in Rome. To take the helm of our realm a man must have thorough insight in our time, its fluctuations and politics, and I would therefore beg of you to choose another. I am not worthy.

Oppius You must realize, that what the senate has decided is not negotiable. You can't refuse for even private reasons. You have only two alternatives: to either accept the responsibility of this honour or to leave Rome immediately in dishonoured banishment. We give you but a moment to think it over. Let's leave him alone to collect his wits. Lictors, dismiss! *(leaves with Minutius and the lictors.)*

Cousin 1 You can't refuse such an honourable distinction.

Cousin 2 Consider, how you in such a position could further your family and tribe! We can't accept a possible refusal. That would be idiocy. How would your family react?

Appius Banished! Wait here a moment, cousins. – Marcus!

Clodius Yes.

Appius What do you think of these turnings?

Clodius I must protest like your cousins. I was almost afraid the senate would accept your stupid decline. Your whole family expects you not to let them down.

Appius They dare to threaten me and state conditions! Accept or leave Rome! It's an ultimatum! Laugh then, my good Marcus Clodius. Don't you think I strove and worked and hoped for this very thing? All politics are just for show like on the theatre. Pretend, and you will succeed. "Observe his humility," they say, "how free he is from ambition, he is afraid to pride himself," how could they but offer me the highest responsibility then? Don't you think I have been lying sleepless for this moment, don't you think I have been shitting blood for nervousness, how do you think I could have had anything but worries for this day? If they had ignored me, my melancholy for the rest of my life would have been incurable.

Clodius I think the senators are returning.

Minutius Appius, your answer?

Appius To obey, gentlemen, and to carefully consider are two very different things. Nature teaches you to obey, but you only learn to rule by long experience. There never was authority or ruler without long dark shadows. Who is extolled and elevated must reckon with the persecution by envy as long as he remains in his exposed position. I have seriously hesitated between the tests and trials of a responsibility of state and the extreme loneliness and hollow desolation of a banishment, and I have made my choice. *(to the cousins)* My friends, I regret that my destiny will now be exile by duty and for the best of our state. Here we depart, and we can no longer be close as friends. Therefore I bid you farewell.

Cousin 1 You refuse?

Appius I must embark on a course of the unknown full of perils and of fear of wasting my time in sweat in the loneliness of the dark night's contemplations, separated from family and friends and banished from myself, for I take on this burden of responsibility.

Minutius Noble Appius, may the gods guide you. Lictors, crown him with the mantle of office. *(They do so.)*

Cousin 2 You almost frightened us to death.

Appius I did not pull your legs, though, for everything I said was true indeed. The office I now assume denies me social life, company and pleasures to instead give me grey hairs, worries without end and endless problems and fatiguing journeys in the slow demanding toilsome vehicle of brain gymnastics, wherein I, to rightly mind my duty and effect impartial justice in infallible incorruptibility, can no more think of family, cousins, relations and my friends. From now on I must only know you by your virtues or crimes, which I then as a judge must assess and punish. Therefore I bid you farewell. Here ends our private concerns.

Cousin 1 Who could have imagined? He is like transformed into another character. I am disappointed. So could anyone who just reaches a position become intolerably proud and arrogant.

Appius (ignoring the cousins) Now for our duties. Minutius, our campaign against Algidon is at stake, as now the army must camp for winter. They lack food and fuel. We must immediately adjust the situation and make the men think of other things than mutiny and rebellion.

Minutius We will immediately handle the matter. Victuals are on their way.

Appius Farewell, Minutius. Good luck. See to it that this victory will be carried through like all the others.

Minutius I am sure we'll make it in spite of all. *(They depart.)*

Scene 2. The house of Virginius.

Numitorius Welcome, dear *Icilius*! Feel completely at ease and at home here, for your attention to my niece and your honest feelings are answered by hers. There is no man in all Rome who is more worthy of courting her than you.

Icilius You make me better than I am, but I take it as a challenge and will try to live up to your expectations. Here is my temple (*takes Virginia's hand*) whose hand I receive to worship in humility and tenderness to try to be what she deserves.

Virginia Now *you* are flattering *me*. Don't put me on any pedestal, and make no ideal glittering idol picture of me, for when the wedding is over and I put off my bridal attire, I will only be myself and nothing more than what is under it.

Icilius Thus the ladies always transcend and outwit those gentlemen who dare to challenge them in compliments.

(enter a servant somewhat upset whispering something in Icilius' ear)

Numitorius What is it? What is happening?

Icilius Your brother *Virginius* has suddenly returned from his campaign in miserable sweat and dirty, disguised and escaped from some crisis in the army, followed by a crowd who want to know more, both hailing his return and fearing its consequences. There is a rumour of some mutiny.

Virginia Then I retire, for this means strictly business for men only. (*excuses herself*)

Numitorius Right, my girl. (*She leaves.*) What else?

Icilius His horse was bloody from his spurs and foaming, wearied out from stress, as if it were to break down any moment, and he immediately hastened to the senate without even greeting friends or neighbours or coming home for any rest.

Numitorius There is a crisis then. May the gods protect us. Let's hurry ourselves to the senate to know how close the danger is that possibly could threaten us. (*They leave.*)

Scene 3. Appius and Clodius.

Appius Leave me alone.

Clodius What is it? I have never seen you like this before.

Appius I am in conflict with myself and have a problem.

Clodius Lucky then for you that I exist to keep your secrets.

Appius Can I trust you?

Clodius Of course.

Appius So hear my confession. I am in love.

Clodius Ha-ha-ha! (*laughs*)

Appius Do you take it so lightly? My heart is failing me, I am in a state of disintegration, the ground is lost under my feet, and I am burning, consumed in soul and body! And you just laugh.

Clodius No, I am only smiling and sharing your dilemma, that you feel that you are just a mortal being with quite natural limitations, and that you childishly torture yourself for that, like an immature enamoured youngster, who doesn't see yourself that there is no impediment. Who could resist you in all your glory and your established position? You are unassailable! It's just for you to serve yourself! Let me go between, if you are ashamed of what you feel. Give me money and mandate to buy her, and she couldn't refuse. It couldn't be more simple.

Appius It's not just anyone. It's the virtuous Virginia.

Clodius Virginia, the daughter of Virginius?

Appius Yes.

Clodius He is busy about the war abroad. It will be an easy match. Do like this. Withhold the army's salaries until further, so Virginius will lose his authority and weapons, while the soldiers instead will turn theirs against him. The daughter is compelled to seek comfort with just anyone, and who would be more helpful and available than you? Thus the father will also be on your side. Or else you could easily lay siege to the virgin tower and conquer it by your authority and power.

Appius Then I give you the licence and commission to start immediately. You have full authority.

(enter Valerius)

Valerius Decemvirs Appius, the senate requires your presence immediately. Old Virginius demands express measures to save the army.

Appius Coming at once. Clodius, get going. *(follows Valerius)*

Scene 4. The senate.

Oppius We summoned you for the urgent issue of the army crisis at Algidon.

Appius Let us settle it at once. Let us hear Virginius speak for the army.

Oppius Sing out, Virginius!

Virginius What are you doing, gentlemen of the senate, withholding the army's salaries and not sending supplies of victuals for your army to live on? For three months we have fought without payment, our equipment is in rags and shambles, and we will soon have no weapons left. What do you mean? Are we to fight like beggars, and will Rome have a beggar army? For what do we have our decemvirs? I beg you for the sake of Rome not to let its bravest army starve to extinction! You still have food and means enough in here!

Appius Am I to answer the soldier, senators?

Oppius Speak for us and for Rome.

Appius We are not here to be commanded. We command. The army is wholly dependent on us, and we decide for it what to do, and we dissolve it when no longer needed. You will have your means and victuals in good time, but until then you must be patient and blindly obey orders and fight with the means and force you still

have left. Rome has always a surplus of force but must consider the economy to survive at all.

Virginius But we are starving! A starving army cannot fight! Aren't you the highest office of command in Rome? Where could we complain if not here? Where could we get help and support if not from you? I must warn you – if you don't relieve the army it could get worse with mutinies and infections, anarchy and dissolution, and then you will only have an army left of deserters. It doesn't work. You must do something.

Appius We will, but not because you ask for it, but because we want to.

Virginius I wish you could see our camp, Appius, so that you could convert the mutineers to better thinking. Is it your intention to turn us to dogs and refuse us bones? Is it your intention to leave the country without defence? Let then foreign fanatics and barbarians invade it as they wish and take over it, and let them chase you senators through the streets of Rome running a bloody gauntlet that will colour the streets red in stinking sauce, and you will see for yourselves what a battlefield is, and how Rome will be turned into one in ruins without an army! Then the enemies will take over the treasury instead. Is that what you wish to achieve by refusing us our salary? Your policy will then turn into a self-consuming illness that only can be cured by the liquidation of Rome.

Appius Your speech is too strong.

Virginius Do you understand what I am saying?

Appius Yes, we do.

Virginius And still you refuse to help us?

Appius No.

Virginius When will we be relieved?

Appius As soon as possible.

Virginius When is that?

Appius Soon.

Virginius Soon! When so many of the bravest already have been sacrificed in vain! When? Soon, as soon as the entire army has been dissolved in disorder and perished!

Appius That's enough, Virginius.

Oppius You have to respect the authority of the decemvirs, Virginius, and be patient. Relief will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Appius The case is closed! The senate is adjourned! (*All break up.*)

Virginius Will I have no more sensible answer?

Appius Go home, Virginius. (*All leave except Virginius.*)

Virginius And such pompous pot bellies you are supposed to obey and serve! We defend their country and build up their power, while they just idle and get sloppy having no idea of reality! Must I then use my own means to prevent the best army of Rome to be dissolved? Alas, thus the best men get the worst salary, while the fruits of their self-sacrifice are lost in the pockets of the worst.

(*enter Numitorius, Icilius, Valerius and Virginia.*)

Numitorius There you are! Why don't you come home? Your daughter is waiting for you to dinner, and your home is made in order!

Virginius Alas, I must quarrel with the senate first. They don't understand what they are doing and in what peril they put Rome. It's like speaking to hollow echoing walls of stone.

Virginia (kneeling to her father) Welcome home, father. You are the only true rock and foundation to us all, to the army and to Rome, like to your home.

Virginius Rise, my child. My brother, she is my only fortune. I hear, Icilius, that you are on your way to become a son to me. I am happy that she chose you, since your ability always was evident. Everything commends you and most of all my daughter's eyes for you.

Icilius My father to be, we came just to press on our contract to be settled.

Virgilius Then I call on you all present here as witnesses. I hereby give up my exclusive fatherly right to my daughter but not my fatherly love. That I will never give up, since it was born with her to constantly grow as long as I live.

Numitorius Icilius, she is yours. Be our witnesses, gentlemen, to this indissoluble engagement.

Valerius I almost wish I was equally fortunate, but there is only one Virginia for Rome.

Virginia I am my father's daughter, and he remains my highest law and will.

Numitorius Brother, this demands a party. Let me give it in my house, so that we could enjoy ourselves this night.

Virginius I am sorry, brother, but I must leave you. My horse is impatiently waiting for me. I must return to the army. They are waiting urgently for the senate's answer.

Numitorius Tonight?

Virginius I am used to moonlight riding, my horse finds its way and never stumbles. I cannot stay. There is a mood of mutiny growing in the army, and I must calm it down fast. The least delay could be fatal.

Valerius But you just arrived!

Virginius And stayed too long. Rome demands it. Or else it could have to pay dearly for saving on its defence. Farewell, my friends and dearest. I must away at once. *(departs)*

Numitorius I don't understand the senate. It's obvious that the army must be supported. Or else we have no army and no Rome.

Valerius There must be a short cut somewhere.

Icilius Let's celebrate our engagement anyway, Virginia, and even more when he returns.

Virginia We shall celebrate it as long as we live.

Act II scene 1.

Virginia Why are you more alone when you are engaged to a stable company and that company is gone, than when you are alone as virgin, free and at leisure? I need company as my loving company has taken leave, more than if I had been alone.

Maid Marcus Clodius is here asking for an audience.

Virginia Marcus Clodius? What does he want?

Maid I think he comes as a messenger.

Virginia Show him in. It might be from Icilius.

Clodius (enters) Don't let me disturb, but I come with only honest intentions.

Virginia So I would think, if you carry a message from the one I think you do.

Clodius I bring presents and promises from one who only wishes you well.

Virginia I thank you for the presents. What new promises does he bring?

Clodius He suffers and can't sleep for his passion for you that keeps persecuting him. He can't stop thinking of you and asks for your mercy and forgiveness for that he can not stop loving you.

Virginia He has not expressed such a sensual passion before. We are not married yet, and he should not strain himself beyond decency until we are properly married.

Clodius Alas, he can't wait for that day! Couldn't I give him some glimpse of hope?

Virginia Is he not aware that we are already linked together by destiny? I really hope we speak of one and the same person. You come from my Icilius, I trust?

Clodius Such a simple ordinary man? Oh no, higher up! The one who has asked me to convey his feelings for you is at the top and could give you all Rome and intends to do it. Your beauty could the same of all Rome if he is allowed to offer Rome at your feet. You could thereby command all the world by the armies of Rome and so import a higher happiness to our Rome and the world than what your friendship with Icilius ever could lead to.

Virginia Whose procurer are you?

Clodius He is himself too modest and sensitive in his sincerity of love to dare expose it personally, but I assure you that Appius has only honourable intentions.

Virginia Then I was mistaken. I apologise. Keep your presents. Tell him who sent you, that my betrothed has far more honourable intentions than his highest authority, who only suffers from most temporary sensual desires and problems of self deceit, which he should be able to cure most simply by sticking to his duties in the affairs of Rome, that is war and politics. I have nothing to do with him, while I am already one with the one I do know, my betrothed Icilius. We have already found our roots in each other, which we intend to cultivate and grow forever. That is all. Goodbye, my good Marcus Clodius. *(leaves)*

Cladius That was an awkward end of the wooing-quest. There is no one else for me to offer Appius, and the demonstratively obvious refusal of this one I couldn't present to him either. We will have to try other more diplomatic and clever courses of action. *(leaves)*

Scene 2. The army camp.

Soldier 1 Any news of Virginius? Is he coming back?

Soldier 2 No news.

Soldier 1 Shall we then endure to be starved by an arrogant government which treats us as if we didn't exist?

Soldier 3 Soldiers, brothers, let's use our swords while we still have strength to use them!

Soldier 1 It almost comes natural. We have not much else to do.

Minutius (enter) Are you of Virginius' regiment?

All Yes.

Soldier 1 That's us all right.

Minutius Why are you roaming around without order? Is there no one to command you any longer? Your loose conference without control almost smells of mutiny.

Soldier 1 Soldiers, shall I state our justified complaint?

All Do so, loud and clear!

Soldier 1 I beg then to report...

Minutius Hold your complaints. I am not here to listen to them.

Soldier 1 Sir, you are obliged to now that you are here and can see for yourself our miserable situation without wages and support. I warn you, if you try to abscond and desert us, your life will not be worth much.

Minutius Well then, let's hear your worst as leader of the discontent.

Soldier 1 I am neither general nor officer but share the ordeals of all the common men, who have to sleep in the cold every night, freezing without blankets, fight with rusty and buckled weapons, tottering and faltering, as the only food we get is watery soup, watery porridge that has been warmed up again several times and other mash like that, usually second hand food that has already been used, almost chewed already and often already vomited once. How could we keep the enemy at bay under such circumstances? We can hardly stand on our legs!

Minutius Are you threatening with laying down your weapons? Or are you threatening with mutiny?

All Hear him, Sir, to the end!

Minutius I understand what he says, but now you must listen to me!

Soldier 1 Our mother Rome has become like a mean stepmother to us, who starves us and still demands that we defend her without food in our bodies!

Minutius Virginius has appeared and spoken to us for you with great emphasis to ease your burdens.

Soldier 1 We haven't noticed that they have become lighter.

All Nothing has happened!

Soldier 1 You kept him with you to keep him from returning to us! Perhaps you have pensioned him, since he is old enough, and he has maybe accepted it and washed his hands!

Minutius You mistrust your ablest general!

All The best! And you won't let him join us!

Soldier 1 Shall I tell you how it is? You save expenses for war machines, swords armours and horses to fatten yourselves, while we have to sacrifice our lives to your greed!

All That's how it is! You don't know what you are doing!

Minutius On my honour, my friends, I expect Virginius to turn up any moment.

Soldier 1 If ever he returns without bringing anything, we will lynch him just to show you how you treat your army. And then we'll take care of those who let him down and gave him orders. And then we'll take care of all Rome and leave it to the crows and vultures, so that you will have a battlefield of your own, just to make you understand what it is all about, with plenty of graveyards attached to it, well prepared for all of you.

Minutius Look, he is coming! Virginius is here! (*enter Virginius with Valerius*) Virginius, you are not safe here. Take care. The soldiers are not only in the mood for mutiny but for some lynching. They appear more dangerous than ordinary enemies.

Virginius But they are my troops!

Minutius But they are desperate. You had better ride back at once.

Virginius Sir, I never escaped from any battle as long as I have been a military, and even less I will do so if my own troops turn in mutiny against me. Where is my lieutenant?

Valerius Here, general.

Virginius Give the order of attention.

Valerius What do you mean?

Virginius I will not tolerate insubordination, neither from you nor from any soldiers. Give the order of attention at once.

Valerius Attention, soldiers!
(*They obey reluctantly and slowly, sick and tired.*)

Virginius Are you in for a mutiny?

Soldier 3 Not me.

Virginius Have you lost your guts, traitor?

Soldier 4 The gods forbid, general!

Virginius Or do you blame your stomach? Is it the gall? Perhaps you are seasick? Vomit then, bastards, and have it done with!

Soldier 5 My general, I would rather die at your feet.

Virginius You are not cowards, are you, lazybones? You can still fight, can't you? You haven't lost your spirit, have you? You know how to use your weapons? You are no scared rabbits or girls, are you? You know what you live for? You still see the warrior's lot as a manly, honest and great sport?

Soldier 1 They have nothing against you, general.

Virginius How quiet they turned now, when someone shook them up into some life, teaching them manners and some lesson! I know that well enough, that anyone could fight and die for Rome without food or equipment or limbs, if he feels like it

and has any moral power left spurning him. Everything is possible. You can accomplish anything, soldiers!

All Yes!

Virginius Give orders of attention ready with spear!

Valerius Attention ready with spear!

(All obey at once.)

Virginius (to Minutius) Watch them, my good senator, they are no mutineers. These are the servants and backbone of Rome, obedient soldiers, honest simple men, who only asked for something to live for and fight for, which is their profession. Rome and your government appear to have withheld the most important thing, the cause, the leadership, the morale! Now they have shown that they still will do as soldiers. Down with your weapons! At ease! Now you can fight, when I stand here thrashing you, miserable clouts and pirates, gangsters and loafers, incorrigible delinquents, who only will be of any good when there is someone to command you!

Minutius Virginius, it is a remarkable transformation you have accomplished in the army like by some sort of magic.

Virginius The most important part remains. Well, can you fight, soldiers? When will you march? Will you be ready for battle tonight?

Soldier 1 My general, we will gladly starve and fall before giving up or fail you, our general.

Minutius I can't see any reason why you should not be able to continue leading your troops and keep your command.

Virginius What remains is the concrete part. I have obtained from the senate of Rome confirmed grants of food, supplies, weapons and armour enough for a year, and the decemvir Appius has himself vouched for this deal. When I finally had them stirred, they were suddenly most incredibly efficient in their speed, like a soldier wakened up by a bucket of ice-cold water.

All (cheering)

Virginius And also an extra bonus to each and every one, but no one knows as yet when it can be paid. *(All continue cheering.)*

Minutius And for yourself? What did they promise you?

Virginius I am not the one to ask anything for myself. But I was finally well treated, at last I was shown some respect, and many senators offered me their seat. And one thing I can assure you, soldiers: You can't guess, when you have wandered up to your necks in the blood of others and your own, how well received you will then be in Rome as worshipped and adorable heroes! *(All cheer again.)*

Minutius Then it's all settled and well. May thus the provisions I brought with me now be shared equally between the regiments.

Virginius So be it. Let then all return in peace and quiet to their tents to sleep well and for a change clean up their quarters, get washed and the whole camp brushed up in good order, as befits the most respectable army of Rome!

Scene 3. The house of Appius.

Clodius Petitioners all day! And what poor fools and idiots! They can't see, that every petition is doomed from the start whatever it contains and is hardly even read. That's how it is with everything written: the more painstakingly and diligently it is written, the less it is read, and the more certain it is to end up in the trash. Well now, here is another petition too much.

Icilius I am looking for his highness Appius.

Clodius (to himself) Icilius! Virginia's betrothed!

Icilius You don't seem to have heard me. I am looking for his grace lord Appius.

Clodius He is busy at work at his desk.

Icilius It can't be helped. I must see him.

Clodius Wait a moment. I'll see if he can spare a moment.

(aside) Icilius! I just hope she hasn't told him. *(leaves)*

Icilius (alone) Waiting! All legal business is only about waiting, and most cases have to wait forever for any justice.

Clodius (returns) May all other petitioners scatter and go home. Decemvir Appius will handle your issue privately before all others, as a compliment to you, Icilius.

Icilius Special case treatment?

Clodius Positively.

Icilius Thankfully and hopefully.

Clodius Here is the man.

(enter Appius)

Appius You won't be needed, Marcus Clodius. It's enough with Icilius and me. Well, Icilius, your business?

Icilius May I speak freely?

Appius The ears of a judge should be able to hear anything.

Icilius And it's certain we will not be disturbed?

Appius We can't be more secure from any disturbance. Clodius!

Clodius (returns) What is the pleasure of decemvir Appius?

Appius A chair for our client. Then you can go. Sit, Icilius. We usually don't humour our clients with such consideration, but we make an exception for you. Well, my good Icilius?

Icilius I plead for mercy for our army and Virginius' contingent.

Appius How has public welfare become a concern of yours?

Icilius By the fact that Virginius nowadays is my father-in-law. He has sacrificed everything for the army. Without the support from the state he has paid it out of his own pocket, entertained it, furnished its most vital needs and done everything for Rome by his own private means, so that he is almost ruined and even has consumed the dowry of his daughter Virginia.

Appius The answer to the complex of your presented problems is as follows, Icilius. We have nothing to do with the army. It's the department of finances that regulates its expenses, while we are just the jurisdiction of the state. We can advise

and advocate but not command or give orders. But it surprises me, that such a talented and promising young man like you would ally yourself with such a family, which is like tying yourself to a rotting falling tree, which by its fall would drag you down with it and consume all your powers and resources for having supported its rottenness. Take my advice and leave the decaying house, which might crush you in its fall, and ally yourself instead to mine, which ground pillars of marble are made to stand fast and remain. Forget that beggar daughter Virginia, whose dowry I could replace three and ten times, if you join my league. I could further you, if you obey me. What are you smiling at, Icilius?

Icilius My lord, do you think that you with the frugal means of the state could promise me a three times doubled dowry when you refused the army its copper coins? I will not believe you until you have given Virginius what you have promised, and when that balance has been regulated, I could start believing you of anything good.

Appius So you decline my proposition and my advice for your advancement?

Icilius I must do so in Virginia's name.

Appius Why in Virginia's?

Icilius Don't you think I have seen you through, Appius? Do you think I am stupid? You dare to buy me with some loose promises just to cheat me of my salary and my gold, as you cheated the whole army of its pay, I don't know why, maybe because of Virginius, who stands in your way. For this his soldiers are starving, and even all Rome is trembling at possible consequences. Your right hand does not seem to know what your left hand is doing.

Appius Are you accusing me of foul play?

Icilius Not only foul play but even playing dirty. Your letters to Virginia are in my hands, and every gift you sent her have been taken care of by me. But don't worry. I will not scandalize you. I just wish to make you aware of your own irregularities.

Appius You see how patiently I endure your allegations.

Icilius And I seek no revenge.

Appius Do you have anything more to say?

Icilius Don't expect any concessions from my side. I will never share Virginia's love with anyone.

Appius You don't need to.

Icilius No, I will not.

Appius I believe you and take you on your word.

Icilius She is mine, and I will protect her against any imaginable hell on earth including all possible intrigues from insidious abusers of power.

Appius Are you finished?

Icilius I have spoken my mind.

Appius Will you allow me to speak in between?

Icilius Please go ahead.

Appius You have jumped to conclusions and are risking going too fast ahead. If I wished you well and offered you my support, could you condemn me for it?

Concerning Virginia, I am far beyond her and have no intention to go between you, if that is what you thought. Concerning the letters and presents you mentioned, I deny them. If anyone in my name has had the audacity to court your Virginia, am I then to be charged with it? Icilius, at least I give you my hand, if you will accept it. I overlook your rashness and forget it. Let's be friends from now on, and don't think the worse of me because I wanted to be your friend. Concerning your intercession for Virginius, come back in a few days, and perhaps the situation has been resolved.

Icilius So you deny everything and regard my stipulations as exaggerations by a young man in love at risk of bolting? And you leave the door open as if nothing had happened. Well, maybe I went too far. I apologise for eventual oversteps.

Appius Promptly accepted, Icilius.

Icilius But don't forget Virginius and his difficult plight.

Appius We shall see what we can do. That I trust was all for the moment, Icilius. Welcome back next time. If you see my secretary on your way out, send him in.

(Icilius leaves.)

Go to your death, you are lost and condemned. Be more careful, Appius, and don't act high-handedly. Control your blood and lust, and they shall be rewarded in the end. Don't be afraid to be a murderer, but murder quietly, and let the weapons be as immediately efficient as completely invisible.

(enter Clodius)

Clodius How was it? Who won?

Appius Are you scorning me?

Clodius You are dark in your face like a storm.

Appius He dares to compromise, will not give in one inch, is as fanatically mad about her as I and swears to rather kill than lose her. What do you do about a dog that pees on you?

Clodius Can Icilius present such challenges?

Appius Am I not the law? Have I not the right to implement what I find proper, have I not deserved any compensation for sacrificing myself for Rome? But he dares to place himself in my way, halt me and say: Enough, but no further, like a highway robber, stopping vital transports!

Clodius Let him be disposed of.

Appius Don't be careless.

Clodius He is not the one keeping up Rome, but we are. If he then obstructs us, then he must get out of the way.

Appius Remember, that we are at the centre of public attention. We can't apply public justice and legal means to achieve our rights in this business. Our position compels us to our warmest smiles when our deepest hatred is cutting our hearts, and to seem to sleep well when the nightmares of worry and anguish paralyse us in sharp panic in the most horrific darkness in the hours of the wolf. He suspects nothing, so let him wander along in complacent insurance of safety. When we then strike at the right moment, let it be a brief and efficient stroke in absolute safety.

Clodius Are you still in love with Virginia?

Appius What a question! Am I still alive?

Clodius So she is yours. Virginius is still in the camp?

Appius Of course.

Clodius While he is away we could claim that Virginia is not legitimate, that she is a bastard and the daughter of a lewd woman, who was a slave under me, for which we could easily construct and produce evidence, sources, testimonies and whatever is legally required. Then we could prosecute her and have her legally declared illegitimate. Then she will be your concubine and no one's bride any longer.

Appius What do we do then with the trouble-maker Icilius?

Clodius If he makes trouble it's just to take him in. He should be easy to provoke to any rashness. I heard every word he said by the keyhole. His most obvious stupidity is his sureness of not being stupid. With him out of the way and her condemned, you will be immune to any scandalization and even stand above the law as decemvir. The thing is to act quickly. Virginia must be taken by surprise so that she is given no time for rearrangement to mobilize any kind of substantial defence. If she is taken aback at once, she could be brought to trial without her even understanding what it is all about. Then she will be defenceless.

Appius I think you might have found the right formula for proper proceedings. Then I leave it to you to carry them through.

Act III scene 1. Numitorius' place.

Numitorius May we have some light, so that our gentlemen could see each other in the darkness? Take your seats, gentlemen, please. I warrant that we will be undisturbed and that nothing should interrupt our conference. (*enter Virginia*) What is it?

Virginia I thought I should be present since it is all about me. Is it all right, uncle?

Numitorius Of course. Welcome, dearest Virginia. Hopefully it's nothing serious, but it might be well for you to be present anyway. Offer her a chair. Icilius, we are now in perfect safety. Present your case.

Icilius It is sensitive, since Appius has evil intentions against me personally, but it touches all of us.

Numitorius And it is not just paranoia of love? Consider well who you are accusing! He is our highest judge and should not be able to do anything wrong. He is practically above all suspicion since he has been entrusted with the highest office of the state as decemvir, and we never had anyone more qualified.

Valerius Icilius, you are close to me as of kin, and your safety is as important to me as my own. But you are still young and impulsive. If you want to make enemies, I beg you to choose someone else than the worst enemy you could have in Rome, that is the representative of the highest justice, power and authority.

Numitorius What danger do you fear? Has he threatened you? If not, are you aware of what danger you place yourself in by accusing and threatening him?

Icilius I am too well aware of that, but his greatness and formal impeccability can not restrain me from accusing him and demand the exposure of truth. By his invidiousness he has cast a veil of lies all over Rome. He is a cheat and a deceiver who strains and tries and stretches his contacts to see how far he can go in deceiving all Rome.

Numitius You go too far with accusations without a cause. I cannot listen to this. You shame us all and sully my home by trying to compromise the highest responsibility of Rome in its most qualified man. (*wants to rise and break up*)

Icilius Stay for a moment, uncle, and hear me to the end at least. You suggest that I make of this impeccable man a monster and want to drag him down into the mud as the well disguised devil he is, but it is worse than that. This highest commissioner of Rome and her most elevated authority is no more than a man, in whom power has gone to his head and transformed him into a possessed monster of perversity and a ruthless sexual psychopath.

Numitorius Fie, my brother's son-in-law!

Icilius He can't control himself and lacks all detachment to his own whims. Daily and hourly he pursues my beloved with generous promises and endless efforts at persuasion to leave me and defect to him, while he tries to drown her in the most sumptuous presents to overwhelm the virgin he is so possessed by, as if he needed her virginity at any price to become a man and get her subjected.

Several (worried, among each other) Could this be possible?

Icilius Possible? Ask herself about it, if I have not spoken the truth!

Numitorius What do you say, Virginia? Mark well of whom we are speaking, the only man in Rome on whom all Rome and everyone is dependent!

Virginia *Icilius* is not exaggerating. I am tired of this constant burden of the powerful man's aggressive attention with love letters and presents without end. I have kept absolutely frigid and hoped that he would calm down, but it has only grown worse. I first kept his painful courting to myself, but when it only accelerated I felt obliged to tell *Icilius* all about it.

Icilius Which is why I visited him myself.

Valerius You went to Appius yourself?

Icilius To the terrible authority and the appalling highest judge of Rome.

Horatius What did you tell him?

Numitorius How did you dare to face him?

Icilius I went there in the formal business to plead even more for *Virginius* and his difficult plight, but when he got enough interested and made everyone else leave the room, so that we could meet each other face to face between four eyes, I let him hear what I really had on my mind. He didn't want to listen, but I forced his highness to hear it all.

Numitorius What was his answer? Make sure over there that the door is secured! No one else must hear anything of this! Speak lower, my son. What did he say?

Icilius He said he was innocent, denied it all and absolved himself from all responsibility.

Horatius And still it was he?

Icilius I presented to him the clearest evidence in the very letters to Virginia from himself.

Numitorius Of course he must deny it all from his position.

Valerius And what was the result? How did you separate?

Icilius As friends. He was completely reasonable and just wished to have it all blotted out and forgotten. He gave a promise to refrain from Virginia rather half-heartedly and far from convincing, so I have strong reasons to suspect some angry scheming behind the perfect outward face. And before I had reached home, someone had been at it again with new promises and offers of love, anonymously, but it could have been from no one else. I am one of the very few who know him, since no one else has seen him through.

Valerius What was his offer?

Icilius That he would support Virginia, warrant his protection and give her advice in her loneliness and worry during her father's constant absence. This alarmed me even more, and that is why I summoned this conference. I am simply worried about my Virginia. With such power and superior slyness he could work out anything to make it look legal.

Valerius What do you suggest?

Icilius That Virginia is placed in security at least until her father is brought back in safety. I wish to hide her away from the bloodhound lictors of Appius. Let her live in secret with some relative. I am only thinking of her security. Uncle Numitorius, as her uncle and closest relative in the absence of Virginius, I think you could find the best solution.

Numitorius The greatest danger we could put ourselves in would be to openly challenge the great man. We must not let it show that he is under suspicion, and no one else must know what we know. The least leak of our knowledge would immediately put my niece at risk, for if we fall nothing can save her. Therefore, let us not do anything but just carry on as usual, pretending not to know anything, until general Virginius is safely returned home to us.

Valerius I hope you didn't talk about this with anyone else, my friend?

Icilius Not one word with anyone. I let the pain stay in my own heart with only my own exclusive rights of self torture.

Valerius I hope you will continue like that, even if it will not be easy.

Numitorius I think we can end our conference. Thanks for your upsetting account, *Icilius*, and that you in spite of all was communicative in this obvious crisis. Still nothing has happened, and hopefully nothing will, but at least we are now prepared. If we have any enemy, he will have to strike first, and then we will shock him by being fully prepared. Therefore our best defence is silence.

Icilius Thank you for listening to me. I will now ask permission to escort Virginia home. Good night to you all, and thank you for the conference.

Numitorius In all its awkward painfulness, it was necessary. Thanks for daring to take the initiative, and forgive our slow reaction.

Valerius Now we know where we stand and will be armed when the crisis comes, if it comes. At least we will not be taken by surprise.

Horatius Until we meet again, friends and cousins.

(They all break up. Icilius piously escorts Virginia.)

Scene 2. The market.

Clodius Lictors, wait for me here and look for Virginia and her company, that usually pass by here every day. Give me the signal, as soon as she is seen. *(leaves)*

Lictor 1 The supreme justice seems strangely fixed on that Virginia, which is a case without a cause.

Lictor 2 It smells of plots at a long distance.

Lictor 3 But what could we do but obey? That's what lictors are for.

Lictor 2 I think I see them. Let them pass in peace, so that the good Marcus Clodius could act as he pleases in his own good order.

Lictor 1 He has an all too obtruding eye to that girl. *(They leave, as Virginia enters with a nurse and fool.)*

Fool How is it really to be in love, lady Virginia?

Virginia That is none of your business. It only concerns my own private feelings.

Fool Aren't you afraid that they will pass?

Virginia I am only afraid that they could end by something happening to my friend. Feelings of love are there to stay. Or else they would not be real.

Fool And how do you know they are real?

Nurse Don't ask such stupid questions, you fool. Don't press her like that. People could think you had a dirty mind.

Fool Who hasn't? Check that character over there.

Nurse Who is it?

Virginia Marcus Clodius, secretary to Appius and his procurer. He is always following me. I am not afraid of him but can hardly stand his sight for his abomination.

Nurse A dirty old man, on my honour.

Fool Don't judge by appearances, ladies. You don't know him.

Virginia I know him enough to wish I didn't.

Clodius (to the lictors) Here they are now. Stay close. – Isn't it the lovely maid Virginia herself?

Virginia Who else would I be?

Clodius It pleases you to joke. But we know each other. I have had constant urgent business to your house.

Virginia As if I didn't know. I would rather you hadn't, and now it smells like one importunity too many. What do you want?

Clodius I must ask you to follow me.

Virginia What do you mean? Why?

Clodius In the name of the law, which the lictors affirm. You had better come with me, since there is a case against you, since you are not the person you claim to be.

Fool You are mistaken, Sir. This is no ordinary street wench for anyone to pick up. This is the virgin Virginia, daughter of general Virginius.

Clodius As if I didn't know. The father is no problem. It's the mother that has to be investigated.

Virginia And if I refuse?

Clodius You can't refuse. The law is on my side. You had better come with me voluntarily. It's best for you.

Nurse Lay off your hands, you dirty old pimp! Is there no frith for women any more in Rome? You only want to debase her!

Clodius It cannot be done. She can't be of baser birth than she already is. I have evidence that she is the daughter of a slave that belonged to me!

Virginia My lord, you are out of your mind if you think you can profess such old women's tales. Don't you think I knew my own mother? Don't you think my mother knew her own daughter? Don't you think I am my mother's daughter? *(to the fool)* Fool, don't fight these incompetent idiots. Any quarrel with them is in vain, for you can't even argue with them. Go and fetch my uncle instead and Icilius, and tell them what I am subjected to. *(The fool runs out.)*

Clodius Are you coming willingly or not?

Nurse Where do you intend to drag her then? To install her in your whorehouse behind bars?

Clodius I am no pimp!

Virginia No, for you are too slow of mind and are only good for nothing. You can't even see your own absurdity!

Clodius Shut up and respect the law! Bow to authority and fear the whip!

Virginia Aren't you a servant of Appius?

Clodius I am your master and can prove it to the senate!

Virginia No, you are only the instrument of your master's uncontrolled selfish lust, which I will prove to the senate when necessary.

Clodius Your idle talk will not help you. The law must be enforced! According to the law, you are my property as a slave! *(enter Icilius and Numitorius)*

Numitorius What is going on here?

Icilius What has she done, since you surround her with armed policemen?

Lictor 1 Get back! A liberation attempt!

Icilius Here we are all free, so there is no one to liberate. Take it easy, gentlemen, and don't work yourselves up for nothing to some hysteria. This virgin has neither committed nor is even capable of committing any crime. What is the problem?

Virginia Icilius, this is crazy! This crank has got the idea that I am the illegitimate daughter of his slave and that I therefore belong to him as his property!

Numitorius This is sick.

Clodius Unfortunately it is all correct, and I have the right of her according to the law.

Icilius Leave her in peace, you scoundrels, or you will have a more furious justice hunting you than the written law!

(*enter Appius*)

Appius What is going on here?

Clodius My lord, we are not here to quarrel but only to follow the law. But this young gentleman wants to fight and obstruct the course of justice! The lictors are here to avert liberation attempts.

Appius You exaggerate your passion for justice. Here are only civilised men and no risk of attempts at liberation. My lord and best friend Icilius, it gives me pleasure to see you. If you have anything to report against the course of justice, file your petitions.

Icilius Justice! This is only about undue interference! This man abuses the law to senseless aggression to serve his own purpose!

Appius Bring your petitions tomorrow. I will give you all the time you need for your issue.

Icilius The prey will not give in, and you haven't caught it yet. Let us have this thing sorted out here and now.

Appius Bring some chairs for all of us. Let us calmly discuss this matter. You too, Marcus Clodius. Sit down.

Clodius (*wants to protest*) My honoured lord and your grace...

Appius Be quiet and shut up! Haven't I asked you to leave my closest friends in peace? Do you have to bother me by encroaching on their privacy?

Clodius I have a just cause to bring to the senate!

Appius He is mad. – Neither we nor the senate will listen to you, Marcus Clodius.

Clodius Do you refuse to listen to my legal claim? Resign then, and let someone else do better justice!

Appius We shall listen to you tomorrow.

Clodius Rather refuse my case at once than torture me by postponement!

Icilius Let us listen to him to once and for all and immediately take part of and cut short the unreasonable claims of his absurd fantasies.

Clodius The deception is entirely on their side!

Appius Keep quiet then at last! Or do you wish to be sent to prison for disturbing the peace? Do you spite the authority of order?

Clodius Not at all, but I have powerful enemies against me, who want to refuse me the right to be heard! This lady is rightfully my slave-girl, although she claims to be of true blood of a good family. It will not do. It does not stick. My purse is too thin to be able to buy justice by lawyers, why I must plead my cause alone.

Appius Let me then warn you about what you might expect if your claims prove to be false. This virgin is of noble blood and has obtained the highest possible education by the best possible father, a veteran general famous for his long faithful

service to Rome and the republic. You want to make her a base-born slave. Consider. If it is proved that you have faked the documents endorsing your claims, your fallacious case will become a precedent for the whole world and the future to denounce with abomination, for in that case it will be obvious to everyone that you had foul and evil intentions against her.

Clodius I have the documents here. Judge for yourself their legal legitimacy.
(hands over the documents)

Appius (to the nurse) Are you Virginia's nurse?

Nurse Almost since she was born, I always had trouble with her and have it still.

Icilius (to the nurse) Please go and get Horatius. We shall need his help. (the nurse leaves.)

Appius (to Icilius) There are some remarkable bothersome details here. Look for yourself, my friend. If this can be proved, Virginius could consider himself deeply dishonoured.

Icilius An infernal slyness shines through this more than obvious falsification.

Appius Come here, Icilius and Virginia. Negotiate with this base creature. It's better to negotiate than to risk her freedom.

Icilius She is impeccability and incorruptibility personified! She is not negotiable!

Appius You choose yourselves. I only give advice. Do you know him, Virginia?

Virginia Yes. He is your lackey.

Appius That is true, but do you know his character? He is a lousy swindler who has made his way by cheating all the way, but he is insidious and dangerous.

Numitorius He isn't exactly an ornament to your house.

Appius That is true, but we who employ such servants are like the cuckold who is the last to know how his wife has deceived him. Thus the elevated and noble are easily compromised by the crimes committed by their parasites.

Clodius That is a calumny! I have my right to demand!

Appius Shut up, you croaking toad! All your singing is desperately out of tune! Didn't I discover you yesterday forging my signature?

Clodius Yes, unfortunately.

Appius For love letters to this virgin?

Clodius I have apologised and explained my way of action.

Appius (to Virginia) Did you receive the letter?

Virginia Not only that one, but I can show a pack of such letters.

Appius Then we can resolve all misunderstandings here and now. Give her the explanation, Marcus Clodius. (enter Horatius)

Clodius My lord, there was no other way for me to reach her.

Appius So you haven't informed the lady of your business until now?

Clodius I have on different occasions tried to establish her freedom in vain.

Virginia Not even in my worst nightmares have I ever experienced the like of infernal intrigues to have me ensnared and prosecuted for nothing!

Appius So you wrote love letters to her in my name, just to get into touch with her to help her?

Clodius And gifts.

Appius What is your aim?

Clodius A quick settlement at court.

Appius That's fair. You will have as short time as possible to manufacture new forgeries and intrigues against innocent virgins. Behold this chameleon, gentlemen. He changes colour into new ones every day, like someone changing clothes for each new day.

Numitorius My lord, I pray, that although the adjustment of this matter demands a speedy settlement, in the name of justice Virginius should still be present.

Appius It is not necessary. Who is in the father's place for the innocent if not her judge? We will not trouble the old man with such a superfluous journey.

Virginia Your pardon, my lord, but such an important trial that is to decide my origin and lineage cannot take place without my father's presence. We must demand a postponement until he arrives.

Appius I must protest. You are only risking your own cause by postponement. Let's think it over until tomorrow. I shall not be able to sleep until I have had your honour exonerated.

Icilius It's a long way from his military camp to Rome. We must demand at least four days' adjournment.

Appius Until then the scandal will reach the entire city, while the issue could be settled in an hour. Let it be tomorrow. Until then I ask you to relax and take it easy, and it will all be arranged for the best.

Clodius My lord, you risk the case by postponing it until tomorrow. Tonight they could smuggle her out of Rome, then we are foiled, and I can never have my demands gratified.

Appius You demand bail for her safety?

Clodius That's a fair demand.

Appius Well then, Icilius will vouch for her.

Clodius He is partial and could whisk her away. Let also the uncle vouch for her.

Appius Well then, your request is granted. To be on the safe side and ensure the legal procedure, I assume guardianship of her. There could be no more secure and safe guardian for her anywhere. She will be safest in my house.

Icilius Never in my life!

Appius What do you have against it?

Icilius You alone with my betrothed? It will not do, my lord!

Appius I spoke from my heart and thought only of her security.

Icilius She is a virgin and must stand under her becoming husband's protection and never anyone else's! Is that clear?

Appius Don't misinterpret me. My secretary, secure bail for the lady being brought to court. And as servant in my house you can take your lousy salary and go home. Your transgressions in my name cannot be tolerated. Lictors, put him under arrest, so that he will be certain to attend the trial which will condemn him once for all for all his deceptions. Or can you give me bail?

Clodius I have no means.

Appius Lictors, he is all yours. Take care of him. A judge's heart must never totter or waver in any direction but must always keep the course straight on in the middle towards absolute impartiality and objectivity, which is the imperative command of justice. See you at the trial, ladies and gentlemen. (*leaves*)

Numitorius O great Appius, if only your heart would be as sovereign as your words, how fortunate it would be for Rome!

Icilius Hurry to Virginius' camp, Horatius, you heard it all, let him hear it, and see that he is in time for the trial. That is vital for all of us.

Horatius I am off at once. (*out*)

Icilius All this is without doubt just manoeuvres of intrigue.

Virginia Alas, in storms it's vital to take in all sails to a maximum, like in crises it's vital not to trust anyone except the closest of kin. If Appius claims to be our friend and to help us, it would only put me on my guard to trust him even less.

Icilius I see a shipwreck approaching under his helm with him as the pilot, but his most glaring mistake is that he doesn't realize, that by steering so obstinately into the destruction of the coastal surge, he must perish himself more surely than all the others. He wishes to ruin us to get at you and sees the shipwreck as the only possibility, but we observe his mistake and can therefore keep our course ourselves, straighten our backs and keep our heads on our shoulders and manage. My love, like any crisis, even this one will blow over. (*embraces her and walks out with her.*)

Scene 3. At Appius'

Appius (to a servant) Here, take this message to Minutius, and make sure he gets it personally, and hurry, for all that it's worth! It's important that you get through before any other messenger. Run!

Servant I am on my way. (*out*)(*Clodius appears*)

Appius Ah, my good Clodius!

Clodius My sincerest compliment to your divine cleverness! You have poisoned them with sweets, and they have swallowed them all and whole without thinking! But what did you send to Minutius?

Appius An order to keep Virginius prisoner until further for suspicions of treason. It could be of vital importance that he does not appear at the court proceedings.

Clodius But how can you motivate it?

Appius Any slightest matter is enough. If only he is out of the way we can go on sailing safely on our own course of action.

Clodius Not even Mercury could have guided the enterprise better.

Appius I am sorry if I was hard on you today, but it was just normal court jargon.

Clodius Of course. A servant of the law must be able to take on anything.

Appius And the law above the written law says, that an evil can only be cured by a greater evil, like a poison bite by a worm only can be cured by stronger poisons. When it comes to high aspirations, the soul has a thousand eyes beyond the seeing ones, and necessity and crisis compels man to think higher and better. If now everything would break up and the pyramid structure of my happiness would cruelly collapse, may I then go down in history as someone who with his might crushed what he himself was crushed by.

Clodius Now you speak in riddles.

Appius Leave then, if you can't understand them. (*Clodius leaves.*)

And have I then reached the summit of my power to be eternally honoured by history, and would I then be denied normal human happiness, when it's still there so close within reach? Would I then deny my own humanity, to sacrifice myself for the perfection of the state? As a man I had a fall in falling in love, and there would have been nothing wrong with that, if I didn't carry the highest responsibility of Rome, which had already married me and raped me by its duties. I fell into the trap of my own career and greatness, and perhaps I found love as a possibility to be freed of it as an alternative. But the challenge was still to combine happiness with the career. Does fate have to make it impossible, or could I succeed? The reward is irresistibly within reach, the most virtuous, enchanting and clever maid of Rome, and I just can't resist her. So I have no other choice than to risk my life waging it all. It's the supreme hazard: all or nothing, if I don't win it all I will lose it all, but the odds are so far obviously more to my advantage than against me, so it's just to go on and refuse to make a halt of hesitation or fear, like when you attack at war. The alternative is not to expand any more, but to stagnate in dullness and stand disillusioned with a wasted and boring life.

Scene 4.

Icilius How could we manage this? Virginia is taken under custody as bail by Appius according to law and may no more live at home. What kind of laws are those that trample the rights of the weak to make the stronger right by injustice?

Numitorius Don't rebel yet, Icilius. There is still hope. The trial is tomorrow, and I have sent an urgent message to Virginius to hurry.

Valerius What does the fool say, our planted spy? Fares the girl well in the doubtful care of Appius?

Fool She is more than isolated, she is placed in a virgin cage without an exit, as if Appius was as afraid that her suitor would importune on her, as he is that Appius would do so.

Numitorius He plays according to law, and our only hope is that his stakes are too high.

Valerius What do you mean?

Numitorius He is piling up pyramids of complications and does not notice himself that the building is as vulnerable as a house of cards.

Icilius If he treats her well, and we could release her from the absurd claims of that grotesque monster Clodius, all would be well, and the crisis would be over without that great Appius having any more chance to touch her.

Numitorius The fact is that Clodius has documents supporting his claims.

Icilius Forgeries! Damned forgeries!

Numitorius But they still are documents for the court to consider. The problem is that he by evil intent made a case for the court of it at all. Then the law must have its course. And that is why it is so important for Virginius to reach home in time, for only he could refute Clodius.

Icilius And what about Appius? Isn't Appius our foremost enemy?

Numitorius In his office of decemvir and judge, he is completely out of reach. Nothing could be proved against him. If he courted Virginia, he has cleverly transferred the burden of his guilt on Clodius, who willingly carries the full dishonour of it. If Appius is responsible for this whole infernal intrigue, he has from the beginning made sure that his hands are clean and that he can't be reached by the law in any way ever.

Icilius I fear that is the case.

Numitorius That's what I fear as well.

Valerius Let's just hope then that Virginius will appear!

All Amen.

Act IV scene 1. The tribunal.

Virginia appears dressed as a slave.

Enter Numitorius with Icilius, Valerius and Horatius.

Valerius They say Virginius has arrived.

Numitorius All hope is not lost yet. If anyone can crack this nut, he is the one.

Icilius He appears to have absconded an order for his arrest. Minutius didn't have time to catch him up.

Numitorius No one ever caught up with him.

Icilius Here he is now.

Virginius (appearing dressed as a slave) Thanks for your support, my friends. It is obvious that you have stuck to me for what I am and not for my position or status, for everything I had has foundered, and the brief fleeting hysterically self-consuming May-fly dance of life consists of only constantly shifting changes and surprises, humiliations and abominations, wrong decisions to what's worse and futile corruptions of what we once were. What emptiness does not the extolled name of Appius expose! What an abyss of twisted aberration, self-deceit and corruption! Whose life is not forfeited here in Rome, if he is allowed to rule and command! And with all his authority and power he is now intent on breaking and shattering a poor defenceless girl and her life, a virgin, sentenced by false laws to be a slave!

Numitorius O Virginius, why do you appear as a slave? You are our only witness, and in this court of justice it is not proper for you and your position as general to thus humiliate and belittle yourself!

Virginius You are quite right, but this outfit suits this case perfectly, for if they succeed in turning her into a slave by law, I will myself willingly renounce all my freedom.

Icilius You are our only hope, Virginius. With the sharp experience of your old eyes you could easily see through the intriguers and their stinking motives. Put them straight against the wall and be as straight as they are crooked in their twistedness, and nothing will remain of them when you are finished with them.

Virginius Thank you, my dear son-in-law, for your backing and encouragement. I could never fear an enemy like these bleak black faceless hoods of doom with lifeless stone faces of dismal formalists to indifferently decide on the life and death of others and without hesitation ruin them by coldly destroying their lives by reason of some far-fetched absurd and misinterpreted manipulated paragraph.

Virginia My father, you gave me my life and freedom once and have the right to retract them. Only you actually have that right. I give you permission to rather sacrifice it to the gods than to the unleashed arbitrary sensual vulgarity of that man of power and ambition. A slave is happier who is allowed to live in thralldom all his life without fearing to become the object of the hunt for sensual pleasure and the ambitious insatiable power greed for more control, and is neither aware of the demand of honour and dignity in life and death.

Icilius We have neither jurisdictional aid, power enough nor resources of force to be able to reform the corruption of the juridical system, and could probably not stop the passions of avarice and greed from jealously dragging us down in their hell of envy. Appius will spare no means to get you, since he is possessed by the dark abyssal fire of Hades to have you deflowered by any means. It's an illness we cannot cure.

Virginius If no one else can, the gods could interfere though and quench it by the tears of compassion, which like another universal flood could overwhelm the world to drown all humanity in its corruption and wickedness, so that even the volcano of Teneriffa would be quenched and drenched and melted in the tears of the oceans. Have the wars then not made this battered head whiten enough in tears and despair, outrage and desperate berserk fury, but must destiny continue hammering and torturing it winter after winter?

Icilius Here are now the jurors of the tribunal and those responsible for the trial.
(*enter Appius, Oppius, Clodius and senators, lictors and a lawyer taking their seats*)

Appius He is not here, is he? If only we could do without the old general, we could make the process short.

Numitorius My brother, greet the judge with reverences as is proper.

Virginius (bowing deep to Appius) Greetings, your honour, judge and chairman of the court. He who does not own much must always fear authority, but that authority is feared and cursed for not fearing anyone and will thereby perish in its lonesomeness

of haughty loathed pride, while the poor and simple always will remain to go on bearing with the world.

Appius What? Has Virginius arrived?

Virginius I am here and ready, as you see, your honour, to defend my family's and daughter's right and honour unto death, as befits a father.

Appius And where is your daughter?

Numitorius She is also here, your honour, and dressed as her father appropriately to the case.

Appius (to Virginius) This clothing ill befits yourself and the court.

Virginia On the contrary, it couldn't be more fitting, considering the nature of the case.

Appius Who is your attorney?

Virginius We have none, my lord. The truth needs no lawyer, and the lie, presented by you, will only receive bribed applause for your empty rhetoric. I desire no lawyer, and he who desires and needs many, I can only pity.

Lawyer Allow me to present myself. As a lawyer I represent the noble Marcus Clodius for his cause, but since you lack a lawyer, I will also speak for you and defend you. It is my duty as a lawyer to carefully investigate both sides of the matter and also consider the prosecuted part for the sake of justice.

Virginius What do you mean? My lord, if you represent Marcus Clodius we don't need you, since our case is bad enough as it is. We are not only dragged to court by the cleverest jurist of Rome, who only did it to hurt us, but on top of that he has a lawyer.

Appius Virginius, I assure you that this trial will be absolutely impartial and neutral. It is my duty as a judge to see to it that there will be no injustice.

Virginius Then our lives are in your hands, and we have no other choice than to trust you for our right.

Lawyer Then I ask to present the intricate issue, so that everything will stand clear. Are the defendants familiar with the accusations?

Virginius Only vaguely. We have no details.

Lawyer Then I will ask to present everything clearly and easily understandable, so that no one may have any doubts about how the matter stands. It's a matter of conflict. One part claims, that the virgin is his daughter. Marcus Clodius, the other part, claims her as his slave, daughter of a previous slave woman in his service and his serf. Is it all clear?

Appius That's enough. All we need is the evidence.

Clodius All documents are here in perfect order.

Lawyer By which fact we have the law on our side. Everything is clear from the evidence. General Virginius was married for fifteen years without issue. The prosecuted virgin's mother then saw how all the general's property by all probability would go to his brother Numitorius at his death. I ask you to listen. This is important. Believe me, Numitorius, I am wholly on your side. When Virginius then was at war, his wife sent him a message that she was pregnant. Observe now the

stratagem of a clever mother. She takes care of a profligate slave girl big with a fresh pregnancy and pretends to be pregnant herself with a cushion under the clothing of the belly. All notice this and exclaim: At last the general will have an heir! The clever mother buys the child of the erotic slave, who is only glad to be rid of it, and presents it as her own.

Nurse You don't know what you are talking about, you villain! You know nothing! You are just lying! It's all balderdash, fairy tales and nonsense! I know better and exactly how it happened, since I was there!

Appius Silence in court! Or else you will be sent out! – Do you have documents to support this strange exchange?

Lawyer Of course. The slave was no more stupid than that she took a receipt for the payment. Here it is.

Appius What was the amount?

Lawyer A thousand drachmas.

Appius And where is the slave?

Lawyer She is dead long since.

Appius Then she can't testify, which makes the story less credible.

Lawyer But on her deathbed she arranged a deposition with testimonies that the transaction actually took place, and that she was the true mother of Virginius' only child and daughter. We have managed to locate this interesting document. With these two authentic, absolutely undeniable and clear documents, the case should be clear. Virginia is the daughter of one of Marcus Clodius' slave women.

Virginius Do you dare to bereave me of my right to my only daughter and question my own fatherhood?

Lawyer No one knows who the father is, and neither is it of any importance.

Virginius This is outrageous human baseness!

Appius Virginius may not speak until he is given permission. One question: If your claim is actually founded on facts, why have you waited for fourteen years in making it?

Lawyer I will gladly give a good explanation to that.

Icilius I bet that they have prepared and practised this dialogue. It is obviously not natural but constructed.

Virginius Let them speak.

Lawyer Marcus Clodius wished to keep the matter quiet during all these years and only divulged the secret to one person: the virgin's mother, who urged him to silence and gave him money for it.

Appius Is there evidence for this?

Lawyer Allow me to present this third document, which mentions and confirms that deposition. Now it explicitly says in the law, that if a slave escapes from a master and stays let us say twenty years at another location and makes a fortune to become established, the master still has the right to claim that slave. She is still his slave.

Appius That is correct.

Virginius How can the representatives of justice and a lawful court even deign to give a serious thought to such a dunghill of absurd constructions and cruel lies?

Appius Can you prove them wrong? Can anyone prove them wrong?

Virginius If they can't be proved false by other constructed documents of lies, they still are just lies of infamous slander.

Virginia Then at least hear my old nurse.

Appius Is she your only witness?

Virginius Yes.

Appius How is it possible that such a famous and well established woman's childbirth has only one witness to be able to say anything about it?

Virginius Unfortunately all others are dead.

Appius I don't think so. They would rather from respect and consideration of your late wife have preferred to keep the matter secret. Old nurse, fear the law! If you bring any more lies, there is the whip behind you!

Nurse I fear no whips, but you threaten me only because you are afraid of the truth.

Appius You have no say in the matter. Lictors, command her to silence.

Virginius Is this justice, that you force the only witness we have to silence?

Appius Study the documents carefully. Doesn't it say clearly, that this was a trick to make a slave your heir?

Virginius Not only are you violating me by denying my fatherhood, thereby also violating and humiliating my life's only child, but you also desecrate a deceased and inviolable woman's reputation, my life's only wife and love, whom you by your law-perverting methods try to deprive her and our only child of love!

Appius I regret that you thus remain faithful to a shameless and calculating female, who so obviously deceived you and only deserves to be mercifully forgotten.

Lawyer Remember, how many soldiers there have been who made children by the way just about with anyone, who never even got a name. Those things happen all the time. Why would your child be any exception?

Appius The case is practically clear. We have the deceased woman slave's testimony in a preserved receipt.

Lawyer Absolutely unquestionable as evidence.

Appius And we have Marcus Clodius' testimony.

Lawyer A gentleman of impeccable reputation.

Appius Then we have his document of the wife's bribes for his silence.

Lawyer Another unquestionable document.

Appius Could there be any doubt at all?

Lawyer Add thereto the remarkable fact, that the virgin only a few days ago still walked about in jewels and the most expensive outfit. And how do we see her now? Where has she hidden her jewels? To whom has she smuggled away whatever she could? I demand an instant and just verdict at once!

Virginius How they juggle well together.

Numitorius Who can not fake writings and signatures of deceased persons?

Virginius And, if he is rich, pay dearly to have a work of forgery done most professionally?

Icilius The good Clodius has been to Appius' school and been brought up by him. Only that!

Numitorius How is it possible that my wife, the closest connected with the said event, who herself was present at the birth, never said a word of any anomaly?

Virgilius And if it actually happened in such roundabout ways, why didn't he make the heir a boy?

Lawyer I shall meticulously answer every question with relevant evidence.

Appius That is not necessary. Here are documents and testimonies enough. Do you think, poor amateurs of law, that the law was written in snow since you so easily can make it melt away by just blowing on it?

Virginius No, we are not that hot.

Virginia I warn you, great infallible Appius, that your lust, which alone is behind all this, will sting you in your own heart like the scorpion, when he himself takes his life from sheer excitement of being what he is.

Appius Don't turn the matter into a scandal. The issue has been settled.

Icilius It has not. We have letters from you personally, my lord, foaming and filled with sensual lust and exorbitantly blunt naked desire of Virginia, written and sent by you in person with Marcus Clodius as your go-between.

Appius This has nothing to do with the matter of law. Are you insidiously trying to compromise me, the highest justice of Rome, with cheap forgeries and lies?

Icilius I have them here. We have them all with us. They should be noted as written testimonies of the same importance as your false papers if not higher, for they are authentic and fresh and reveal your partial motives.

Appius I already said, that the case is settled and closed! Lictors, quiet him and take care of him and drive him out!

Icilius (is overpowered) What did you say, mister attorney? That it was your legal duty to as carefully view our side of the matter as your client's? And still we are not even allowed to present more authentic evidence than yours!

Appius Resistance against the law and contempt of the highest court of justice! That means imprisonment! (*hammers*)

Virginius My valiant son-in-law, if you are thrown to prison for this, I swear to take on shackles myself at your side! — Appius, we forgive you everything that you have done and are doing, but the gods will never forgive you.

Appius You dare to threaten me.

Virginius No, I am just stating facts and observe what counts beyond the injustice of this world. In spite of my humble origin and position I am honest, and I have ancestry eight hundred years back of righteous forefathers, but you are only known for the role you are playing since eight months back.

Appius You rave in your wounded pride, and we forbear the demented antiquity of your grey hairs. You can go out and rage against the gods, if it pleases you.

Virginius That is not necessary. I am on good terms with them, but you are on good terms with the crocodiles.

Appius His talk is irrelevant to the protocol. All that remains is the verdict.

Virginius If that is all that remains, and all that we presented in fresh and valid documents and testimonies in our defence is to be ignored, I only ask to take leave of my true and beloved daughter, before she is taken away to the jackals.

Appius Then perhaps we might hear a confession. He wants to show his colours. Let him do so.

Virginius (embracing Virginia) My beloved, farewell. I haven't cried before, but from now on I will never cease to cry over you. I am a general and hardened warrior, who has only grown harder with the years, but I do remain no more than human and as a consequence of the prolonged absence for many years from my beloved family with the more golden a heart. I apologise and beg you of forgiveness that I have not been able to save you from this pinch. But you know that I am and remain your father whatever strange machinations may be invented by means of law, and you remain my daughter and my only unique child of love, by which your mother always was blessed, peace and honour on her memory!

Appius That's enough! Irrelevant sentimentality in court is declined!

Virginius Virginia, our sorrows were born when we were born, but there are no sorrows without an end, and that's the comfort of eternity.

Appius We must pronounce a verdict!

Virginius No verdict is needed, you sovereign Appius. I willingly forsake her to justice, since you so eloquently and methodically by law have decided that she is not my daughter.

Appius Well, then we need not trouble ourselves. The accused has confessed. That makes the course of law easier to fulfil. Let then Marcus Clodius take care of her. (*hammers*)

Virginius Hereby I leave my daughter to the justice you demand, (*produces suddenly a knife and immediately cuts her throat,*) but a higher justice is demanded by the gods. Look now, proud Appius, what you have accomplished by your reckless desire! She is now liberated from the demented pressure of your passion! If your lust isn't cured by this, then take her blood and intestines and handle them as you please!

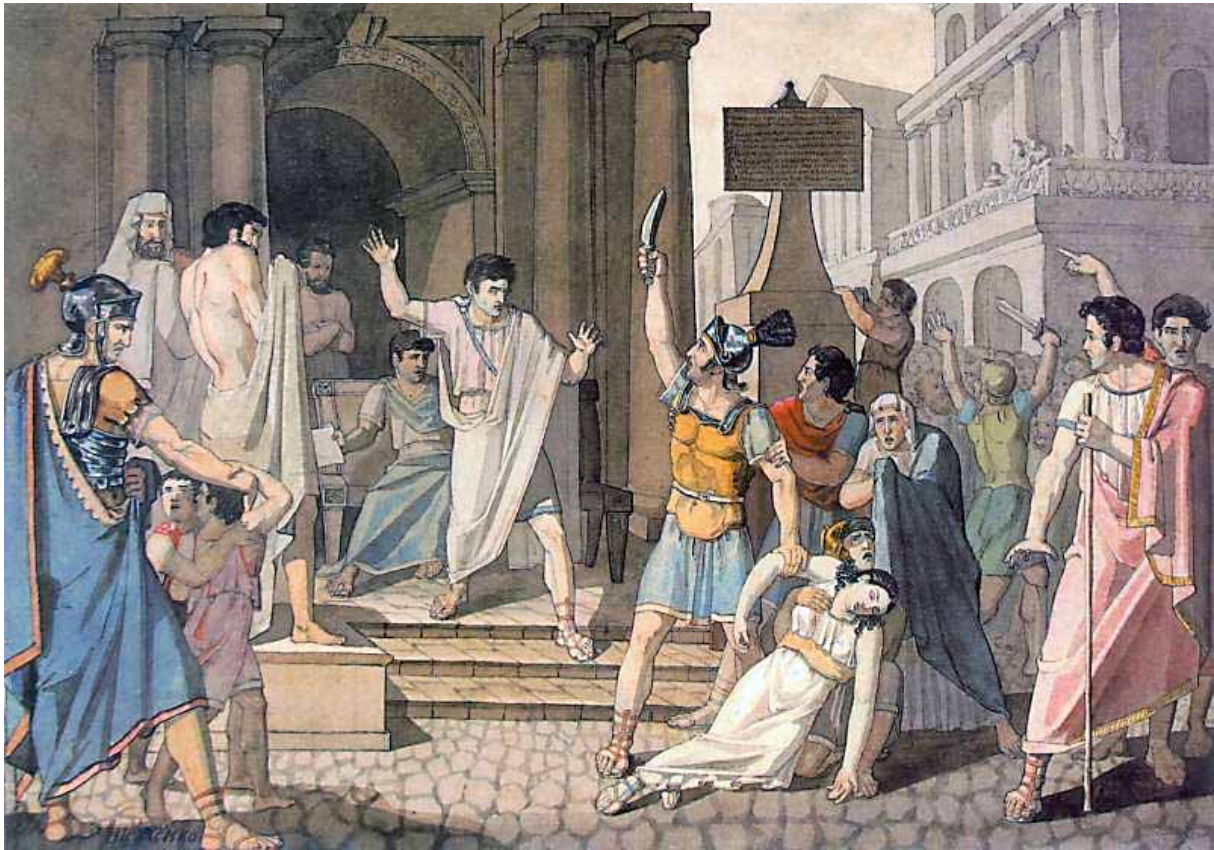
(All express their shock and horror, crying out loud.)

Appius (shaken and shocked, stammering) Arrest the murderer!

Virginius Have I then resisted a thousand battles and armies without being defeated, and shall I then succumb to a handful of imbecile hangmen's lackeys? Damn me, but I'd rather go to hell! (*escapes and avails himself of the total confusion to get away.*)

Appius (bawling) Arrest that murderer! He has befouled the law, justice and court by committing an outrageous crime in the very court! This cannot be accepted! (*The confusion grows to a turmoil, Appius bawls in vain, Virginius gets away, everyone is in everyone's way, and only Icilius tenderly devotes himself to Virginia's body.*)

Icilius He did right, if even it was in maddest desperation, but according to the ruling order of justice, that was the only possibility for an appeal. (*lifts her and carries her out without minding the blood. Appius stares after him devastated.*)



Scene 2. The camp.

Minutius (reads a letter) I can't understand this. How has Virginius fallen out of grace? Is he getting old, or has he done something? Who am I to question the authority? Here you are only to obey orders and hope for the best. So I must divest Virginius of his command and keep him under arrest for suspicion of treason. Well, it's easy enough to keep him out of command, so let us hear him then and learn some more.

– My good man, I appoint you tribune to replace Virginius, who has some problem with the senate. All of you who marched under Virginius, this is now your tribune, until we learn what has happened.

Officer My general, I will do my best as tribune in Virginius' place to live up to his high example, but I hope together with all of us that he will soon be back as our general.

Minutius So I hope indeed as well. (*Enter a soldier upset.*) Well, here might be some news. What's up, my friend?

Soldier Virginius has arrived but in a critical condition as if he was mad, all bloody with a knife in his hand which he refuses to let go of, harrowed, in one

moment crying and quarrelling in the next, as if he was on the point of a nervous breakdown.

Minutius Then something must have happened.

Soldier That's what it looks like. But that is not all. There are crowds running after him, loose people, followers who hail him and lictors and law officials crying: Catch him! Arrest him!

Minutius Then there is some conflict going on.

Soldier That's how it seems.

Minutius I just hope he didn't do anything stupid.

Soldier It seems rather to have been something drastic.

Minutius Yes, that's how it seems. I must warn my men. It's best to be prepared. – Men! Virginius is on his way alone but with both followers and soldiers at his heels! Take care of him when he arrives, and ensure the safety of his person! Not a hair must be touched on his head. First of all we must have clarity in the situation. Form a ring around the camp, and let no one enter except Virginius!

Tribune Yes, Sir. Order! Execute! (*All make ready.*)

He comes home to his family. That's how it feels like. There is no affection greater than in the hearts of soldiers for a general who cares about them, and that love Virginius has earned more than anyone else. By that the wounded will manage and survive even death.

Virginius (enters, all bloody, with the knife ready to cut up himself with)

If I have one single faithful friend and brother left among Virginius' men, I beg him to step forth and finish me off before I do it myself! What, no friend? No one willing to help me? Cut me up, release the soul from my body and let me out of the despair of this life! No one yet? Could there not be someone in this crowd of professional murderers who could be my enemy and would gladly see me dead, or some compassionate friend who could liberate me and cure my situation by the swift efficient operation of death? Will no one rise? Am I then so loved? Minutius! There you are! If there is any man in the encampment who is good at punishing offences, send him to me and let him give me the reward of my crime, and I will die content by a worthy hand!

Minutius What do you mean, Virginius? What have you done? You come home to your camp all bloody with the wildest looks and your hair all messed up in disarray as if you were haunted or arrived directly from some holocaust!

Virginius Alas, send me someone then, whom I could command to justly kill me off! If no one wishes to or refuses to obey orders, I will have to do it myself! (*raises his knife*)

Minutius Virginius, you are no longer in command. By order of the senate you have been deprived of your command, which even has ordered your arrest on grounds unknown. You have possibly been touched by some treason.

Virginius Then I bow to you and thank you and give up my freedom and my life to you. May you treat me arbitrarily according to your pleasure.

Minutius But what has happened? What's the meaning of this blood on your arms? You look as if you had butchered somebody. And why are you persecuted by all Rome, with weapons to catch you on one side, while others greet and hail and want to fight for you? In brief, you appear somewhat controversial.

Virginius Your guess is correct. I have butchered my daughter.

Minutius Virginia?

Virginius Condemn me and execute me! I am guilty! I did it all by myself! With premeditation and perfectly sound of mind! Nothing can forgive me! My wife is long since dead, and now I also killed my only child. Execute me, and do it at once! I deserve nothing else!

Minutius But why for goodness' sake?

Virginius Isn't it enough that I did it? Do you require all the gory details? Let the whole world know! Virginius has murdered his only daughter and his only child! Here is the evidence! Here is the murder weapon! Do you need more evidence? Isn't the case as clear as daylight? Could I be more guilty? I plead guilty! Let me only die, the sooner the better!

Minutius But why? I still wait for an explanation.

Virginius Why do you kill your child? Because you love her more than anything else, to save her from a fate worse than death, and she asked for it herself, she gave me permission, she expressly begged me to take her life if we would lose her!

Minutius Lose her? To whom or to what?

Virginius Alas, let me just dry some red tears! I have cried blood almost all day. I know, that all soldiers cry blood now and then, and they should, because it is healthy, or else they are no real soldiers, and I will now cry the red tears of blood for the rest of my life, until I have cried out my eyes into dissolution and left the black holes of them empty from despair!

Minutius Don't wander off in your mind any more now, but tell me what has happened.

Virginius They wanted to force her into slavery under Marcus Clodius. They wanted to force her into serfdom under Appius as his concubine because he desired her, and they wrung the law to legalise the bridal theft from Icilius, her only right husband. They sent lictors on to her to place her into custody and isolate her until they could seize her legally. They wanted to take her away from us. We protested, and it went to court with Appius for a judge. They paid the best lawyer in the world, and we were left without. Thus he manoeuvred and manipulated us out of all justice and raped it to be able to rape her. Then she told me: Rather take my life, father, than leave me to them. I obeyed her when all hope of justice was gone. I butchered thousands in battle, but they were all enemies of Rome. For the first time I feel like a murderer, and the one I murdered is my own daughter! There can be no pardon. I committed the worst crime that could be committed! Punish me! Court martial me!

Soldier 1 It's that villain Appius, who denied us salary and supplies.

Soldier 2 Virginius is without guilt. It is Appius who caused this virgin murder.

Virginius But Appius was in charge of justice and only followed the letter of the law! He did nothing! But I made myself the murderer of my own daughter!

Soldier 1 No, the intrigues of Appius led to the murder.

Soldier 2 It was your hand but Appius' responsibility that caused the murder.

Minutius If all this is true, Virginius, which is confirmed by the crowds that followed you crying your name in triumph, then you are as much to pity in your innocence in a crime that demands a just retribution.

Virginius Noble Minutius, you have a daughter and a wife, like most of you have. This could have happened to you. Who knows among you all who might in this moment have his wife raped or his daughter reduced to a slave by the authority of the lictors manipulated by the lusty greed of avaricious bullies? Don't think anyone of them could be safe at home or anywhere in Rome, for that is where my daughter was!

Tribune This concerns us all.

Soldier 1 Appius must be deposed and hanged.

Soldier 2 Who is our general if not Virginius? Whom can we trust except him? Give him back his command!

All Virginius our general! Virginius our general!

Minutius It's not more than right. Virginius, I give over my own command to you. Your full rank is yours again and with a vengeance. You have been so wronged, that no one except he who himself lost his only child could understand and know how to punish the offence. Virginius is now general in my place!

All Hurray! It's fair! He is our man! Hurray! (*etc.*)

Virginius I am an old man and long since ready for my grave, and now as Virginia my daughter no longer is my daughter I am completely dead as man, for whom nothing remains but one thing. The same hand that separated Virginia from life must also separate the murderer. It's not more than right. (*wants to kill himself*)

Soldier 1 (stopping him) No, general, no foolery and no self pity any more! Are you not a soldier? Have you forgotten how you chastised us and kept us from rebellion, when the senate of Rome with Appius starved us to incompetence? We can survive all the worst and even death when put to the test! Prove yourself a soldier and not a weakling!

Minutius Don't abandon your command so cowardly, Virginius. Try not to run away from the battle that now is at hand which might be your last, but only you can lead us through it.

Virginius My wife is gone, and my daughter lives among the vestals of Elysium, and I long to get there. Is that not reasonable, human and natural? But you force me to the only destiny that now is even worse than death, which is to be compelled to stay on and live with my own unendurability. Well, those of you who still have wives that haven't been taken away from you or daughters who haven't been confined in whorehouses as slaves in the serfdom of prostitution, I shall be your partner in the defence of every intact virginity and the remaining integrity of your

families. I have nothing any more to lose for myself, so I might as well give my life to you.

All Hurray!

Soldier 1 Virginius was predestined to save Rome for us!

Virginius I accept the burden of responsibility in the hope of being able to save you and others from my inhuman trials. I still have my pride left, that I have had a daughter, the most virtuous and outstanding virgin of Rome, whose absolutely pure blood was shed for all of us and for you, for Rome to survive with the honour and her virtue in remembrance forever! May she always live in sanctity in our minds and for Rome as an eternally protective virginity!

All Hurray! (*They carry out Virginius on their shields in triumph cheering.*)

Act V scene 1. Forum.

Icilius, Valerius, Horatius, Numitorius from one side,
Virginius and Minutius from the other with soldiers.

Icilius Halt!

Minutius What is your want?

Icilius Talk with Virginius.

Minutius He will not be let through between two armies without a hostage as bail.

Numitorius That's reasonable. Neither do we leave out our general without a warrant. Who do you suggest for a hostage?

Minutius Myself.

Numitorius That's fair. I gladly offer myself as hostage.

(Both come forth and embrace each other.)

Minutius Well met, Icilius.

Icilius How is the old man?

Minutius Well under the circumstances, but he is beaten.

Numitorius All Rome is in rebellion for his sake.

Minutius No wonder. How is it with the ruling party?

Numitorius They are in hiding. Appius isolates himself, his lawyer writes orations to change sides, and Marcus Clodius is terror-struck.

Minutius And the senate?

Numitorius It is all for us.

Icilius My father-in-law, I believe the worst is over now.

Virginius You can tell that to someone else. The worst is never over. Give me a drink.

Icilius (to Minutius) He has a fever!

Minutius He is overstrained and washed up but stands on his legs. He is on the brink of losing his mind and control but hasn't lost them.

Virginius Give me some wine, so that I can be with you and talk with you.

Numitorius (pours him a glass) Alas, your hand is shaking. Let me help you, so that you don't spill it out on yourself.

Virginius I am all just a spilled out waste, and I will not be rid of it until the worms have eaten me up. What more have I to live for than to get drunk and fatten this sad carcass as food for the worms?

Numitorius Don't give up, brother. We stand at the beginning of a new and better Rome.

Virginius I thank you. Of course it could only get better. It could hardly get any worse.

Icilius It hurts me to see you in such a sad state, my father-in-law.

Virginius Don't call me father-in-law any more. Your wife my daughter was never more than a virgin, and it was I, not you, who shed her virgin blood.

Icilius Which I cannot forgive you. How could you commit such violence against the one you loved so unfathomably more than I?

Virginius That I wonder myself every day and hour. I can't understand that I could, but my soldier's hand is trained enough to never have hesitated to take any life professionally and efficiently and as painlessly as possible. We soldiers are the butchers of the battlefields and learn the art to work swiftly and smoothly to avoid unnecessary extra suffering. I had no choice. She asked for it. The one you love you owe obedience. I had no right to deny her freedom at such a prayer. And consider the alternative: as a prostitute sex slave without rights under Marcus Clodius for a pimp and Appius as a possessed consumer.

Icilius It's the worst tragedy in Roman history.

Virginius But unfortunately a necessity. Haven't we as Roman noblemen sworn to rather die with honour than live as slaves? If we don't follow the oath of honour we have no Rome.

Icilius And what is done is done. We cannot have it undone. Let's then join our two armies together and give Rome a new and better order without any possibility for the abuse of power by too much licence and authority to its governors.

Virginius You think right, my son. We have a free Rome ahead of us to manoeuvre and steer straight on open seas of freedom on a steadfast course by right and honourable ethics, and this is now our responsibility.

Icilius So let us go to the senate and embark on this constructive labour. I think, father, that you could survive this crisis with your honour.

Virginius I don't think so. My quota of ethics in life is wasted. I have laid a deadly hand on a child of my own. If even the whole world and future would acquit me, I cannot do so.

Icilius Just don't pity yourself, for you are not worth it. We must work now, father. Let's be industrious and cut down the rotten trees, so that the forest can grow and expand. That's what Rome deserves now after the evil crisis of this difficult trauma. *(takes care of Virginius and leads him out. All others follow.)*

Scene 2. All gathered in the senate,
Virginius presiding as judge.

Virginius We have reached a remarkable trial with turbulent preludes that has turned Rome and the city upside down, but we have an impeccable example to try to live up to: Appius, my predecessor, who seriously strove after objectivity at any price, impartiality and absolute unbiassedness. He fell to a human factor with a human catastrophe as a consequence, for which we now have to try him together with the chief responsible Marcus Clodius as the acting part. The great Appius is fallen, but his ideal example lives on. So let us by all means strive to follow it. Bring in the two prisoners.

(Appius and Clodius are brought under escorting guards.)

A new strange trial with completely changed roles with the difference, that this time we are entirely without any lawyer. The defendant in the last case is now your prosecutor, and we all know too well the nature of the case, since we all were involved in its hair-raising details. The only accusation against you is that you are responsible for what happened. How do you plead?

Appius Virginius, no one can more regret what happened than I except you. It was a disaster that no one could foresee, and no one can more clearly see the full width of my responsibility as the one who blindly drove the matter to that desperate shipwreck which followed. I have the greatest sympathy and respect for how you reacted by enforced necessity, and I regret that you couldn't have acted otherwise. You acted like a true Roman and paid dearly for my fatal mistake, but immediately paid the full sum of all you had. I accept the full responsibility and the just sentence, which could be death. I ask for nothing less. I was the supreme judge of Rome and abused this position, for which I must take all the consequences. My crime is unforgivable, and my fault cannot be defended even on any human grounds. I accept my full responsibility.

Virginius Marcus Clodius?

Clodius I have nothing to say, since our Appius already has accepted the full responsibility.

Virginius You have nothing to say for your defence?

Clodius You have all the facts, as you said, since we were all part of the unexpected tragedy.

Virginius Then the only thing left is to pronounce the sentence. After discussions, we the governors, Minutius, Numitius and I and a few more, reached the conclusion that the hardest hit should be judge in this case. It is Icilius, who was the one who lost his wife without having had any part in her death. Icilius, come forth. What do you propose for their sentence?

Icilius I suggest for them a choice. As the supreme judge the noble Appius himself proclaimed, there is no other sentence possible than death. The question is how it is to be delivered. I want to give them the possibility to pass it with honour.

Give them each one his sword. If they want to leave their lives with honour, they may do so by their own hands.

Appius (at once) It is fair. Give me the sword. *(He receives a sword.)*

I thank you for giving me this possibility to depart from my life, my Rome and my office with honour. You can see for yourselves – for me there is neither hesitation nor fear. *(intends to immediately cut himself to the heart, when Virginius interferes.)*

Virginius Hold it! Such a noble heart must be given a possibility for afterthought to us more conscientiously sensitive judges. I am myself inclined to a pardon. He has demonstrated strength of conscience and with remarkable civil and high moral courage assumed the whole responsibility. How do the rest of you view the matter?

Icilius Hold! We can't accept any compromise with justice! How did he himself manage the issue of the degradation of the virgin to a slave? He didn't even allow our witness to speak! No compromise! *(storms out)*

Virginius Icilius has spoken. What about the rest of you?

Numitorius I think Icilius left to mobilize some witness in the case.

Minutius Let us then wait for what he brings.

Horatius Forsooth, this case imports constantly new surprises.

Appius I beg of you, gentlemen judges, don't keep us burning. Give us death, allow us to give it ourselves, but don't leave us pending. I maintain that death is the only thing we deserve.

Icilius (returns with four carriers of Virginia's bier with her untouched corpse)

Appius is right! Can you behold the body of this virgin, the sacrifice to an abominable injustice and intrigue against her virtue and honour, life and future, and not grant those responsible the death they have deserved?

Minutius Alas, I was not here but can see the whole tragedy. No, we cannot forgive this.

Virginius I was guilty of the murder, while Appius was not.

Clodius No, Appius alone was guilty! He was the one who led me on! I acted only by his directions, as I always did! He had me constantly under his foot!

Icilius Don't get soft, Virginius. A general and judge must not be soft.

Numitorius The burden of responsibility is overwhelming for Appius.

Appius I have already assumed full responsibility for the virgin's death, no matter how little it was intended. So let there finally be an end on it! My crime was that I loved the lovely maid too much and was blinded by love to make use of improper means to reach my goal by using my position. But as the perfectly constant virgin she was, she resisted all means of power that were used against her, for the faith she kept for the only one who owned her heart. You are right, Icilius, and have been right all the way, and I respect you for it and willingly accept your most correct punishment. *(drives resolutely the sword through his breast and heart and dies instantly.)*

Virginius Thus was his case resolved. He chose admirably his honour to live without honour. May he be honoured for it. The other remains. Marcus Clodius, how do you plead now? Are you still putting all the blame on him?

Clodius I can only plead for mercy. I refer to the fact that I only obeyed orders. All orders came from Appius. He accepted the responsibility. I therefore renounce all responsibility.

Icilius But you contrived and carried through the prosecution and the whole infamous fake intrigue with forgeries and humiliations! If Appius ordered you, you could have refused, if you had any conscience!

Minutius How does Marcus Clodius answer to that?

Clodius I plead for mercy. Is all this blood, two dead lovers, not enough as victims of your bloodthirst? I can't commit suicide since it is against nature. You have to cut my throat yourselves if you insist.

Icilius Yes, we insist! Take him out, hand him over to the hangman, and let him hang as any low criminal and hopeless villain! I hold him alone responsible for my Virginia's death! I acquit the late Appius! Both he and Virginius have sincerely accepted the responsibility for the virgin's death, but Marcus Clodius, who alone effected the prosecution and trial, tries to escape his responsibility! Get him out! Hang him at once!

Numitorius It is fair.

Minutius He cannot be pardoned.

Virginius The judges are unanimous. Marcus Clodius is hereby sentenced to death by hanging. Execute the sentence.

(the guards bring out Clodius, who protests violently, makes resistance, fights, and so on.)

(when he is gone) Then there is only one thing left for us to do. To avoid any form of abuse of power in Rome in future there is the proposition, that the ten decemvirs and their offices be abolished. Can we agree on this matter?

Minutius To the fullest.

Numitius It is necessary as a consequence.

Icilius Thus Rome will get back her freedom.

Virginius Then it is settled. *(hammers)* Let us then at last dedicate ourselves to our sorrow in burying our dead. Let Appius and Virginia have an honourable and proud funeral in common, for in spite of all it can not be denied, that he loved my daughter. This weakness led to his fall, but he took the consequences and died for her. Like me, he could not live without her. You and me, Icilius, are condemned to a heavier lot, to have to live on. I leave it to you, for I have not many days left. I only wish to grieve to death for that I by my daughter's death have been cruelly deprived of my life by destiny, since she was my only fortune and all I had left to live for. But perhaps there was some possibility for me to act differently than I did? Perhaps Appius could have answered that question. Now he can't any longer. I therefore ask to resign. *(lays down the hammer)*

Minutius We all suffered more than enough for this. Let us now in sorrow follow this ill-matched couple, that ultimately were joined in the end, to the headquarters of sorrow and their last resting-place, which may forever remain a sanctuary to Rome, for the example of Appius' superior competence as an ideally striving and objective

judge who only went humanly wrong, and for Virginia, the foremost of virgins and beside Lucretia the most admirable of Rome's ladies.

Icilius It is enough. Let our funeral march and solemnity begin.
(*Virginia and Appius are carried out on two biers beside each other,
and all follow the procession of sorrow.*)

The End.

*Naini Tal, 10.11.2008.
translated 13.2.2019.*

Comment

The main problem with "Appius and Virginia" is the impossibility to have it dated. This is more often than not the problem with most plays that evidently had co-author(s) but more so with this one than with any other. Traditionally, the co-author was Thomas Heywood, (who according to himself co-authored more than 200 plays), but the dominant part is without doubt the same voice that wrote "The White Devil" and "The Duchess of Malfi". Most critics agree that it must have been written either in the beginning of 'John Webster's' playwright activity (before 1608) or at the very end (after 1625), which fact accurately illustrates the dating problem.

The details about the starvation army and its arguments, however, rather definitely fixes it to after the historical crisis with an army in Holland in October-November 1624 under Count Mansfeld. They were sent off to Flushing without proper supplies and eventually left in Gertruidenburg to starve. The realistic rendering of the starving army in "Appius" and their rising taste for mutiny corresponds exactly with the war scenes of the failed war drama in Holland. The drama serves as a very complementary tale to that of "The Rape of Lucrece" produced 30 years earlier. In fact, it's a very appropriate finale to the whole Shakespearean era of great tragedies with the Roman ones constituting perhaps the most particular chapter of them all, dealing with justice and politics on a universal level, which "Appius and Virginia" also does although in a more resigned, compressed and Spartan form than any of the earlier ones.

Since it so obviously has more than one hand in it, I here leave the authorship question open without comment.

Objection: "Armies at the time were commonly left to starve – even successful ones. England had loads of starving sailors after their defeat of the Armada in 1588."
(PC)

Yes, but the rendering of the mutinous starving army in act II is so realistic, the commander actually having some difficulty in appeasing the troops, which he does in an admirable way, very much reminding of Antony's reversal of the political situation in "Julius Caesar" by the funeral speech, which it must have been influenced by, while the realism of the mutinous troops (not any sailors) hardly could have been made so strong, (it's actually perhaps the most dynamic scene in the play,) without fresh experience of it in reality. The only parallel to the 1624 disaster was Essex' failure in Ireland. The difficulty in dating this play makes speculations about this point inevitable.

There are however some 'marlovian' traits to be found even here. The 'banishment' signature occurs but in the reverse – Appius makes fun of it in act I (scene 1, 38-70,) but it's still a definite variation of the almost main Shakespearean theme.

And here is a typical 'marlovian' twist:

"This of my fate in after times be spoken, I'll break that with my weight on which I am broken." (the last lines of act III scene 3.)

"Appius and Virginia" was first published in 1576 by a certain "R.B." (Richard Barnfield?) That play, however, is very inferior to the second version printed for the first time not until 1654, almost 80 years after the first version.

Let's in this context bring in the Bacons for a quick experimental investigation. The probable production of "Appius and Virginia" coincides with Bacon's final years and, like so many Shakespeare plays and "The White Devil", deals heavily with jurisdiction, which was Bacon's main field of experience. He was the first Shakespeare alternative candidate brought forth 200 years ago, when the first doubts rose about Will, and is still the strongest candidate supported by massive literature and followings. He if anyone would have been greatly concerned with the failed Dutch war and stranded army at Getruidenburg, as every British political crisis during his age was of the deepest concern for him, since he always had a hand in them all. His poor efforts at religious verse, his pathetic failure of a marriage and his leaving himself vulnerable to the envious intrigues of Buckingham and other ambitious scoundrels in the lewd corruption circles of King James present some quite imposing question marks actually outdoing Marlowe's in blatancy, since Bacon was the second most powerful and influential man in England after the King. Baconians generally claim at least the productions of Marlowe and Shakespeare for Bacon. In view of the fact of Ben Jonson's close standing with him during the final editing of the Shakespeare works, it can't be eliminated that Bacon had a hand in it. His concern about "concealed poets" communicated to the King, however, was probably not a concern for himself in view of his supremely high position. The homosexual Anthony Bacon was Marlowe's colleague and friend in France during the Walsingham years, and since Francis took over the intelligence of Anthony, it's most credible that he also carried on the collaboration with Marlowe. Francis Bacon and

Marlowe both present some curious common traits: both were sexually unfathomable, there are sexual mysteries about them, both were rumoured to associate with boys, neither had any children, Bacon would have done better unmarried like his brother, and we all know what the Puritans thought about Marlowe. One plausible theory states that both were undecisively bisexual. We shall never know the whole truth, but the inter-connections between Anthony Bacon, Marlowe, Francis Bacon, Jonson and Shakespeare speak very much for that Marlowe and Francis Bacon understood each other and collaborated more than well.