

THE DEATH OF AEMILIUS PAULUS

A play in three acts

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Cary Reed
cary@caryreednovelist.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

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| <u>Lucius Aemilius Paulus:</u> | Roman consul |
| <u>Gaius Terentius Varro:</u> | Co-consul and rival of Paulus |
| <u>Scipio:</u> | Roman military officer, son-in-law of Paulus, husband of Aemilia |
| <u>Aemilia:</u> | Daughter of Paulus, wife of Scipio |
| <u>Fabius Maximus:</u> | Roman dictator, rival of Varro, friend of Cato |
| <u>Marcus Cato:</u> | Roman senator and military tribune, ally of Varro |
| <u>Cornelius:</u> | Roman senator, rival of Varro and father of Scipio |
| <u>Claudius Pulcher:</u> | Roman military officer, friend of Scipio |
| <u>Servillia:</u> | Friend of Aemilia |
| <u>Pamponia:</u> | Wife of Cornelius, mother of Scipio |
| <u>Senate Magister</u> | |
| <u>Centurion</u> | |
| Various senators, soldiers, roman citizens, slaves, and lictors | |

SCENE LOCATIONS

Various locations in and around Rome

TIME

During the Second Punic War (217-216 BCE)

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING: We are in the Forum, seeing into the main chamber of the Senate House (Curia Hostilia).

AT RISE: The Rostrum is set for a speaker to address the audience. In the Senate, the old MAGISTER waits, a large walking stick in his hands, as SENATORS arrive in togas with purple stripes and take their seats, talking among themselves.

(VARRO enters, mounts the rostrum and addresses the audience)

VARRO

Behold! Varro speaks! What woeful times
These Romans must endure! Lost our way,
We have, our Rome. First, Fabius, weak and gutless,
Here his is who leads us now.

(FABIUS enters, sits apart from senators)

There, Fabius stands,
"Maximus," they call him. Great, you ask?
I know not. Many, many say he's far from it.
Overrated, I say. When young, he stuttered,
Fa-Fa-Fa-Fabius, I dub him now.
"Thou canst not say that!" they exclaim, but lo,
I say it nonetheless.

Two consuls we possess most times,
Equal in power, to keep kings at bay.

(sighs)

Once, kings we had, and since they've gone,
Driven out. Tis worse now.
In other lands, a king I'd be, but here,
Approval of the witless must I gain.
For me to run for consul, the Senate must approve.
These witless few, they judge me, find me wanting.
They judge not me, but you, dear common folk.

With dire events, a dictator we need,

I should have been the one, all know 'tis true.
The senators, they envy me, they see
My crowds, their size and passion, and they fear.
My base they call "rabble," but they are wrong.

These so-called "elites" Fa-Fa-Fa-Fabius,
In their esteem, a dictator made.

Why him?

The name of Hannibal doth ring. A genius,
The greatest leader of our time, perhaps.
Manly and forceful, Rome needs such a man.
A man such as I, many, many people say.
He struck our ally, small and unimportant,
In Hispania, Gaul, or some such wretched place.
Thus, war with Carthage we must wage once more.
He crossed the Alps, defeated consuls three,
And claimed poor Flaminius' life.

(Holds a skull) Alas, poor Flaminius!
For he, like me, a populist, they say.
Yet my crowds are much larger. Vast!
(tosses skull carelessly over
his shoulder)

Fabius's dictatorship will expire,
The Senate must decide to renew.
The Senate, ha! A pack of old fools,
No wonder Hannibal did choose to strike.
(CORNELIUS enters, sits among
senators)

Behold, Cornelius!
Crooked Cornelius, first consul to fall
To Hannibal in this grim, gruesome war.
His son, young Scipio, did save his skin,
Or else his head would grace a sharpened pike.
But father, son, no love between them holds. Sad!
(CATO enters, sits among
senators)

And Cato, Marcus Cato, where are you?
Stand up, great man! A loyal man, he does
What Varro tells him, ne'er a question asked.
Sit, Marcus! Sit! Good man.
(PAULUS enters, sits among
senators)

And then there's Lucius Aemilianus Paulus,
The favored one, the belle of this grand ball.
His daughter, Aemilia, a thorn,

A nasty woman, always whining.

They say Paulus holds a treasure rare,
A thing called "virtue," made to shame us all.
When I was young, they asked what man I'd be:
Courageous, just, or wise? I said,
"Rich!" for all the rest, a scam, a hoax, a lie.
My wealth, dear friends, arises from the trade
Of slaughterhouses, where the swine meet fate.

There's one more matter, friends, before the Senate,
A law to curb what women can possess,
Their garments, jewels, and some matters more.
I must confess, my care for it is slight,
But those who favor me do seem to care,
And so, I too, the Lex Oppia embrace.
Pray, do not ask me to expound its depths,
For lesser minds than mine have woven its design.

(sighs) I now must join these rulers feeble and old.
The time of Varro cometh, that I swear,
And as your consul, I shall rout Hannibal,
Defeat him soundly, leave him dazed and crushed.
With your support, together we shall strive
To make our Rome great once more!

(VARRO sits among senators)

SENATE MAGISTER

Order in this august assembly, order, I say!
(He bangs his stick on the floor
twice)

Hear now, ye Senators, the Magister speaks,
And calls to order matters of the state.
Upon our hallowed floor, the balance seeks
To weigh the fates of laws that we create.

The Lex Oppia now demands our vote,
To send it hence unto the Comitia Tributa.

Step forth, ye Senators, with hearts aflame,
Present your thoughts, your passions, and your creeds.
For in this hallowed hall, we share the aim,
To serve the people and address their needs.
Now, Marcus Cato, we call upon your voice,
Speak your mind, let the Senate hear your choice.

CATO

Esteemed senators, I stand before you,
To advocate the passage of this law,
The Lex Oppia, which aims to restore
The ancient virtues that our Rome once knew.

In times of old, our women did abide,
By rules that sought to temper vanity,
And fostered modesty, a worthy guide,
To shape our Rome with strength and unity.

Our city thrived, a beacon to the world,
With women knowing their own place,
But now, alas, indulgence has unfurled,
And threatens Rome's foundations to displace.

I urge you all, my fellow senators,
To lend your voices to this worthy cause,
And bring about the change that Rome implores,
To save our state from its impending fall.

SENATE MAGISTER

Order, once more, esteemed senators, hark!
 (He bangs the stick on the floor
 twice)
Aemilius Paulus, now we seek your wise remark,
Share your thoughts, and let your counsel embark.

PAULUS

Esteemed colleagues, now I rise to speak,
Against the Lex Oppia, a harsh constraint.
While some may deem it virtuous and wise,
I see it otherwise, a needless weight.

Our wives, our daughters, mothers of our kin,
Deserve a voice, a choice, in how they live.
To dictate dress and trinkets they may wear,
Is but a step to strip them of their freedom.

This Lex Oppia, cloaked in modesty's name,
Will breed resentment, discontent, and strife.
Let us instead empower those we love,
To stand together, our partners in life.

Reject this law, and hold our women dear,
Embrace the change, and watch our city grow.
For Rome is strong when all her people share
A common purpose, forging trust and hope.

SENATE MAGISTER

Debate on the Lex Oppia has reached its end,
Now, senators, 'tis time to vote, attend!

(He bangs the stick on the floor
twice)

Raise your hands, ye noble men, make your choice known,
By this action, the fate of Rome shall be sown.

(He counts the votes)

The votes are counted, the decision now clear,
The Lex Oppia passes, to some, a victory, others, fear.

(Clamor)

Order, I say! Order in this chamber, cease!
We've made our choice, let the uproar now release!

(to FABIVS) Fabius Maximus, I must remind you true,
To speak in favor of oneself, one mustn't do.
As Dictator, your silence is required by law,
Let others advocate, your self-praise to withdraw.

CORNELIVS

Hear now, O Senate, my esteemed voice,
As I, Cornelius, shall make my choice,
To advocate for Fabius's reign,
And justify his slow, relentless gain.

The errors of my past, I must confess,
At Ticinus River, brought distress,
I charged at Hannibal, fierce and bold,
But victory, alas, I could not hold.

My colleague Sempronius, brave and true,
At Trebia River, met the same fate too,
His men lay slain upon the blood-soaked ground,
While Hannibal, unscathed, marched on unbound.

But Fabius, with his steady hand and mind,
A different path, a wiser way, did find.
He nearly trapped the Carthaginian beast,
And would have crushed him, had his grip not ceased.

Extend his rule, let him maintain his course,
For Rome shall rise, triumphant, with great force,
And when at last, Hannibal makes a blunder,
Fabius shall strike, and tear his ranks asunder.

(Senators become noisy with
crosstalk)

SENATE MAGISTER

Order in the chamber, senators, I say!
Cease this unruly clamor, let us weigh
 (He bangs the stick on the floor
 twice)
Senators, let us maintain our decorum and grace,
As we hear from Gaius Terentius Varro in this place.
 (Varro arises to address the
 Senate)

VARRO

Varro, the voice of Rome, I stand to speak.
Against the cautious Fabius, I rise,
His slow approach, I deem, our strength belies.

This man, they call him wise, I dare to say,
Displays a timidity that feeds our foe.

Oh, Hannibal, a general much like Varro,
We share a spirit, fierce and unafraid.
Yet now Rome falters, led by feeble hand,
That shakes and trembles, fearing to command.

And while our Fabius stalls, the people turn
To Varro, who they trust to lead them right.
My speeches in the Forum draw crowds so vast,
The gods themselves are surely aghast!

This multitude, they flock to hear my voice,
And in my strength and vision, they rejoice.
For Rome deserves a champion, fierce and strong,
And Varro stands prepared to right this wrong.

PAULUS

Esteemed senators, I do confess my admiration,
For Fabius's strategy, which guides our nation.
Yet, though I see the merit in his plan,
I cannot lend support, as I began.

While times of crisis call for desperate means,
And we may yearn for control by any means,
The danger lies in concentrating might,
In one man's hands, it's neither just nor right.

I urge you, senators, to contemplate,
The values that our Rome does cultivate,
And let the people choose the course they steer,

Through this dark time, with hope, not fear.

We trust in them to make the rightful choice,
To elect consuls who shall raise their voice,
And heed the wisdom of Fabius's way,
While honoring the Republic, come what may.

SENATE MAGISTER

Debate on this matter has come to an end,
Now, senators, 'tis time to vote, attend!

(He bangs the stick on the floor
twice)

Shall we extend Fabius's dictatorship yet more,
Or appoint a consul to share Sevilius Geminus's chore?
Those in favor of extending Fabius's reign,
Raise your hands high, and let your vote be plain.

(He watches as the senators
raise their hands)

The votes are counted, and the decision is due,
Fabius's dictatorship will expire, as scheduled, true.

(He bangs the stick on the floor
twice)

A new consul will be appointed, with haste,
To share Servilius Geminus's power and space.
Until the next consular election arrives,
Let Rome's fate be guided by these two wise.
With this decision made, let us bring this session to a
close,

And let our leaders move forward, to face Rome's foes.

(He bangs the stick on the floor
twice. SENATE MAGISTER exits the
chamber, bringing the session to
a close. FABIVS approaches CATO
as all other SENATORS depart the
chamber.)

FABIUS

Cato, if you would, stay a moment more,
For I would speak with you, about this war.

(Pulls CATO aside)

Marcus, let us talk, for we are friends,
Though lately disagreements mar our bond.

CATO

Pray tell, dear Fabius, reveal to me,
Why Lex Oppia earns your disapproval?

FABIUS

Friend Marcus, the purpose of our laws,
Is to protect the people from themselves,
And from the tyranny of state's own power,
This legislation fails in both respects.

The simplest farmer grasps with certainty,
The conditions under which all life thrives,
Yet even wise philosophers fall short,
In knowing what makes humans flourish best.

We must assume that each one's path is unique,
And grant them space to shape their destinies.
The state's own role: to foster such a sphere,
Wherein our citizens pursue their joy.

CATO

My Fabius, in politics I find,
The core of who we are, our very selves.
Where one does stand reveals their virtues, vices,
And guides the center of their character.

I hold respect for you, but must confess,
With those whose views diverge from mine, I struggle.
To keep a bond of friendship strong and true,
When politics do tear our hearts asunder.

FABIUS

My Cato, if you hold to such a view,
I fear a lonely path you shall traverse.
For no two souls see every issue eye to eye,
And that, my friend, is perfectly alright.

Our great Republic stands upon the base,
That disagreement shall be commonplace,
Yet through the art of compromise, we find,
A common ground for those with good intent.

CATO

But tell me, Fabius, is Lex Oppia
The sole concern that concerns you today?
Or is there more that you wish to discuss?

FABIUS

The Lex Oppia, true, does split our thoughts,
But Varro's rise, I fear, a greater ill.

This man you stand beside, a demagogue,
He thinks of naught but self and fleeting fame.

His words, like poison, spread through Rome's fair streets,
Ensnaring minds with false and gilded dreams.

I urge you, Cato, weigh the path you tread,
And ponder well the man to whom you're bound.
Is Varro's cause the one that truly serves
The greater good of Rome and all her sons?
I ask you now, as brother and as peer,
Reflect upon the course you now embrace.

CATO

(smirking)

I see his flaws, this Varro whom I aid,
His hunger for the praise and hearts of Rome.
But in these times, the game of politics
Requires a voice that rouses men to act.

His popularity, it serves my causes,
And wins elections, pushing laws I seek.
And with his help, our goals shall be achieved.
So, though his nature may not be refined,
I stand with Varro, for the greater aim.

FABIUS

I understand your stance, and yet I warn,
This Varro is a flame, too fierce to tame.
Do not deceive yourself with thoughts of reins,
For he may slip your grasp and wield his own.

CATO

Your words I hear, respected Fabius,
But times have changed, and so has politics.
No more the genteel art of compromise,
Instead, a stage for spectacle and show.

Engaging masses through their deepest fears,
And stirring hearts with hatred and disdain,
Varro succeeds in capturing their minds,
A skill that's valued in these trying times.

So, with respect, I bid you now farewell,
Our paths diverge, though friendship still remains.
May Rome find strength in both our separate ways,
And rise above her challenges, unscathed.

(CATO exits)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: We are in PAULUS's home, in the atrium. Couches line the fresco-covered wall.

AT RISE: SCIPIO and AEMILIA are relaxing on a couch.

(PAULUS enters in his toga.
AEMILIA and SCIPIO stand.)

PAULUS

My dear daughter, and son-in-law, I return.

AEMILIA

(Kisses her father on cheek)

Father, how did the vote go, on the Lex Oppia?

PAULUS

Sadly, it passed, and reason lost to madness and fear.

SCIPIO

And what of Fabius's dictatorship, did it remain?

PAULUS

No, it will expire, and a new consul will be appointed.

The Lex Oppia, I fear, will be greater pain.

(sighs) A barbaric law, I call it thus.

Do they not value freedom, and women's progress?

AEMILIA

Indeed, my dear father, I do concede,

The Lex Oppia is flawed, a bitter law,

But laws are not eternal, they can change,

And be unmade when wisdom shows its face.

My greater fear lies in Varro's ascent,

If he is chosen consul, Rome may weep.

For in his grasp, our city could be marred,

And damage done that takes long years to mend.

PAULUS

Fear not, my dear Aemilia, have faith,

For Varro's path to consulship is steep.

The Senate, wise and watchful, holds the key,

His rise requires our blessing, not just the crowd's.

Though he may gather common folk's acclaim,
Their voices joined in thunderous applause,
Without the Senate's nod, he cannot climb,
And take the seat that governs Rome's great laws.

SCIPIO

Oh, Paulus, this world of politics
Doth leave me sickened, weary, and dismayed.
For in this realm, it seems that ignorance
Is oft preferred to wisdom's shining light.

The masses, fickle, choose the foolish jest
O'er sage advice and years of hard-won skill.
Experience, once valued, now is shunned,
And brash, untested voices hold the stage.

This strange inversion of our noblest traits
Doth vex my heart and leave me much perplexed.
How can we lead, when reason is dismissed,
And base desires hold sway o'er Rome's fair land?

PAULUS

'Tis true, Scipio, that politics doth draw
The demagogues and charlatans to feast
Upon the promise of unbridled power.
But know, republics fall when they alone
Hold court, and men of virtue turn away.

You, Scipio, are young, yet brave and true,
A patriot whose leadership shines bright.
I hope you'll reconsider your disdain,
And see the chance to serve within the fray.

For Rome, in desperate need of virtuous men,
Requires your hand to guide her in these times.
Do not forsake your city in her hour,
But rise and stand, a pillar of her hope.
Embrace the challenge, Scipio, my son,
And let your light illuminate the path.

SCIPIO

(takes Aemilia's hand)

I hold no wish to be as father is,
A consul grand, who seeks his fame in war.
I find my joy in hearth and home's embrace,
Content with love and peace to fill my days.

PAULUS

Indeed, my son, your yearning I do see,
And love and family are life's true core.
Like sun and rain, they nourish, help us thrive,
And in their warmth, our deepest roots take hold.

But freedom, too, a vital force we need,
To seek our happiness, our dreams to chase,
For this, the realms of politics and law,
And war, when needed, serve to guard our land.

Embrace them, Scipio, as protectors true,
And you shall serve both love and freedom's call,
Defending all that makes our lives worthwhile,
And standing firm when shadows threaten all.

SCIPIO

I thank you, father, for your counsel wise,
And promise that your words I will consider.

PAULUS

I thank you, Scipio, for heeding words,
And Aemilia, daughter, for your thoughts.
Now I retire unto my quiet study,
To find some solace and my thoughts renew.

At dinner, we shall gather once again,
To share in laughter, love, and warmth combined.
Until that time, I wish you both some peace,
To rest your hearts within our family's bind.

(AEMILIA kisses PAULUS on the
cheek, and PAULUS exits)

AEMILIA

I fear for Rome, my love, as darkness falls,
And share your dim view of this game of power.
The Lex Oppia, a twisted, cruel law,
A misogynist reaction to our progress.

As women, we have made our steady gains,
Yet now I see some men would pull us back,
Desiring to return us to mere chattel,
And strip away the rights we've fought to claim.

I once believed that progress could not wane,
But now I see that it can be undone,
This realization chills me to the core.
Rome's path is veiled in fear and doubt.

These men do stoke the fears of others,
For they see women gaining strength and say,
"What if this power o'er their lives they wield,
Becomes a threat to us, our fragile rule?"

SCIPIO

My dearest Aemilia, fear not this plight,
For I shall stand with you, and boldly speak
Against this Lex Oppia at the Comitia,
And voice my thoughts before the gathered throng.

Though Hannibal casts shadows o'er our land,
Our Rome must not forget her daughters' worth,
Nor let the darkness cloud our hearts and minds,
For they, like sons, do bear Rome's future hope.

AEMILIA

My love, your offer warms my heart,
Yet I must stand alone and speak my truth.
For we, as women, must be heard ourselves,
Not through our fathers, husbands, or our sons.
The Comitia shall hear my words resound,
A clarion call for change, for rights, for all.

So, Scipio, stand beside me, lend support,
But let my voice ring clear and unobscured.
Together, we shall strive for Rome's great good,
And forge a path where all are free to speak.

SCIPIO

Aye, love. This, I can do.
(They kiss)

AEMILIA

My Scipio, give heed to father's words,
Consider now the path of public office.
For all can see, you are a leader born,
A man with strength and wisdom to command.

SCIPIO

My sweet Aemilia, I regret so deep,
That I was not beside you in your loss.

(AEMILIA turns away and touches
her belly. SCIPIO wraps his arms
around her, putting his hands
over hers.)

My duty to the state may call me forth,
But I shall do no more than is required.

I'll strive to stay as close to you as I can,
And if the fates are kind, my dearest love,
You'll never face such pain alone again.

AEMILIA

(saddened)

Though we may part, in body, for a time,
Our hearts and thoughts remain forever bound.
In every moment, you reside in me,
A comfort that sustains me, near or far.

(turns to face him.)

(becoming breathy) Fear not, my love, of things beyond
Our power to alter; let us focus, love,
On precious moments that we have as one.

(AEMILIA kisses him)

We'll make the best of all the time we share,
And hold each other close, in joy and strife.

(They continue kissing)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 3

SETTING: The hot room (laconicum) of the Senate Bathhouse, a small room of intense dry heat like a modern sauna.

AT RISE: VARRO is relaxing, naked save a loin cloth, sweating profusely.

(CATO enters, naked except for his loin cloth, looking queasy)

VARRO

Ah, Cato, welcome to this quiet chamber,
Within the senate bath's hot, arid room.
Here, we can speak of plans and strategies,
Unburdened by the risk of prying ears.

CATO

Too many naked men here for my taste,
I feel dirty in this place. It's so... Greek.

VARRO

(laughs)

A bath is not for modesty, but for health,
And if you can't stand the heat, go somewhere else.

CATO

(sits, sighs)

Dear Varro, how I envy your great skill,
Your gift for rhetoric that stirs the crowd.
With eloquence, you sway the hearts of masses,
A talent rare, I wish that I possessed.

VARRO

My Cato, you possess great skill in speech,
Yet your concern for facts and logic weighs,
And hinders your appeal to hearts en masse.
To capture minds, seek out the passions' flame.

Give heed to what attention you may gain,
In good or ill, attention is the key.
For in that gaze, both rapt and captive held,
Lies power to sway, to move, and to command.

But, Cato, I perceive flattery employed.
Do you now seek some favor at my hand?

CATO

In keen perception, Varro, none compare,
Your watchful eye, the truth it doth lay bare.

Varro, I ask of you to lend your voice,
In Rome's grand forum, to our noble cause,
The Lex Oppia, which we both endorse.

(a NAKED MAN enters and crosses
the stage. CATO looks away in
revulsion, but VARRO starts as
he speak, nodding in admiration
at the man's physique)

VARRO

(sighs, bord)

Marcus, truth be told, my interests lie elsewhere,
And such concerns do not consume my thoughts.
So why, dear Cato, should Varro lend his voice,
To champion this cause within the forum?

I must inquire, what's in it for Varro?
For time is precious, and I weigh my words,
To use them in pursuit of my ambitions.

CATO

Varro, my friend, I ask you now, consider,
Is it the consul's seat you long to claim?

VARRO

Marcus, mark my words, these senators
Deny Varro what is justly mine, the seat
Of consul, though I wield both wealth and fame.
Yet they, in arrogance, do scorn Varro still!

I am like, by far, the richest man in Rome,
A fact they know and yet refuse to heed.
Is it so much to have them recognize
The power I hold within this ancient city?

It's very unfair, a shame, a disgrace!
That I, who've given all, am thus denied,
The consul's seat, a role that I deserve,
While lesser men, unworthy, take the reins.

CATO

My Varro, as a new man, I too share
Your ire, the scorn of Rome's elite is harsh.
Yet know, my friend, that wealth and fame alone

Are not the currency they hold most dear.

Honor, a prize more precious than mere gold,
Is what they value, what they seek to claim.

VARRO

What kind of currency is honor, then?
It buys me naught, unseen and intangible.
To gather honor, one must risk and toil,
Or part with wealth for some grand public cause.

Such foolish acts are not to my taste.
I value that which can be touched and held,
Which brings me comfort, power, and influence.
Gold, unlike honor, bends the world to me.

CATO

My Varro, there remains another path,
Though darker, filled with subterfuge and guile.
The Senate's favor can be won by means
Less noble, but perhaps more expedient.

If honor's currency holds no appeal,
And gold, your cherished prize, falls short as well,
Consider then the art of whispered deals,
Of shadows cast in Rome's political halls.

VARRO

Varro is listening.

CATO

It is Cornelius who holds the key,
Controlling votes within the Senate's halls,
Enough to tip the scales in your favor,
And grant approval for your candidacy.

With his support, the doors shall open wide,
For you to vie for Rome's esteemed consulship,
To lead our people and to shape our fates,
As destiny has always meant for you.

VARRO

But Cornelius hates Varro. He hates Varro, Marcus!

CATO

Yes, but Cornelius, whose reputation once,
For military prowess, stood unmatched,
Now suffers from the stain of defeat.

He failed to halt Hannibal in Gaul,
And at Ticinus River, lost the day.

VARRO

But tell me how Varro may employ his shame,
To further my own cause and gain his trust.
How can I use Cornelius's past,
And turn his failures into my advantage?

CATO

His brother, Calvus, is in Hispania,
And there he's won great fame,
In battle against Hannibal's brother.

VARRO

And how can Varro use this knowledge?

CATO

(sighs, shakes his head)

Pledge to Cornelius command in Hispania,
A chance to join his brother, yes?
There, he could restore his reputation,
And in return, his support and votes you'll claim.

VARRO

Cato, my friend, I see the wisdom here,
But there's a hurdle we cannot ignore,
For he and I share no love or respect.

Cornelius hates me, that much is clear,
And were I to approach him with this plan,
He'd likely spurn my offer, filled with scorn.

CATO

Varro, I offer this, a pact between us:
I shall approach the man and broker peace,
To win his favor and secure his votes.

I ask that you, in turn, support my cause,
To stand and speak in favor of the Lex Oppia.
Let your persuasive voice be heard in Rome,
In service of this law, for which I fight.

VARRO

Done! I shall speak in favor of your little law.

CATO

(stands, relieved)

Good. Now I must leave this hot room,
Before my poor balls melt into my seat.

(CATO stops at the edge of the
stage, looks back at VARRO)

CATO

This Varro, in his vanity, doth plot,
And scheming for the consulship, he seeks
To wield a power I dare not entrust.
With armies at his beck and call, the man
Could shake the very core of Rome and set
Ablaze our dearest values, ancient ways.

Oh, dark and treacherous thoughts do fester here,
A serpent's coil within my breast takes hold,
For in this dangerous game, I've played my part
And given life to this potential scourge.

To counteract his will, a co-consul wise
I'll seek, who'll weigh against his recklessness.
A hand to balance scales, a measured mind,
To curb the wild desires that he might harbor.

For Rome, I'll find a man to stand by him,
And in that union, strive to save our state,
To thwart the tempest of a Varro unbound,
And quell the chaos that his rule portends.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 4

SETTING: Paulus home, atrium.

AT RISE: The atrium, with PAULUS's office
(tablinum) off to the side,
quipped with a desk and two
chairs.

Enter AEMILIA and SERVILIA,
tired, carrying their sandals)

AEMILIA

A thousand voices, countless faces met,
Throughout the forum we have walked today,
And tried to sway opinions on this law.

(They sit and rub their feet)

Yet, I despair, for many did not know
What Lex Oppia was or what it meant,
Nor even when the Comitia Tributa meets,
To cast their votes upon this pressing matter.

So much remains to be done, Servilia,
To educate, inform, and turn the tide.

SERVILIA

Indeed, dear Aemilia, I have met
With many men and women in the streets,
Some friendly, others hostile, some aloof,
Their voices varied, and opinions mixed.

I find it curious that some poorer dames,
Whose lives are touched by hardship and by toil,
Do favor Lex Oppia, strong and firm.

Perhaps resentment fuels their support,
For wealthy women, draped in finery,
May spark a fire of envy in their hearts,
And thus, the Lex Oppia might provide,
A means to level Rome's uneven scales.

AEMILIA

I confess, I fear our efforts to oppose this law
Are met with stony hearts and stubborn minds.
The common folk, it seems, are swayed by those
Who seek to curb our rights and bind our will.

I cannot grasp how Varro and Cato hold

Such sway upon the streets of Rome.

How can it be that they, our fellow kin,
Do not perceive the wrongs this law would bring?
And yet, it seems, their voices rise in praise
Of those who'd see us silenced and constrained.

My heart is heavy with the weight of doubt,
And though I strive to rally and resist,
I fear the tide may turn against our cause,
And leave us, voiceless, in the shadows cast.

(SLAVE enters)

SLAVE

Senator Cato, Domina.

(SLAVE exits)

CATO

(Entering)

Greetings, Aemilia, Servilia fair,
I trust the day has been both kind and mild.

AEMILIA

(Coolly)

Cato, good day, welcome to our domus,
Your presence, strong and (wrinkles nose) scented, graces
us.

Might I suggest a visit to the baths?

(Cato sniffs himself while the
women hide their laughs. PAULUS
enters his study.)

CATO

Ah, Aemilia, the baths, you see,
Are far too Greek in custom for my taste.
I find the Tiber's waters more my style,
A more Roman way to cleanse and invigorate.

AEMILIA

(With a wry smile)

That does explain the scent that clings.

SERVILIA

A most Roman scent, though, like... like our streets!

CATO

Hmm... Yet, I must note, as I walk Rome's great streets,
A scent of urine oft pervades the air.

(AEMILIA and SERVILIA smile and nod. SLAVE enters)

SLAVE

Senator, the dominus will speak with you in his study.
(CATO bows to the women and follows the SLAVE to the study.
SLAVE exits.)

SERVILIA

Aemilia, dear friend, what do you think
Brings Cato here, to speak with your good father?

AEMILIA

I know not the cause, but come,
Let me show you something near,
A fresco on the wall by father's study,
A piece of art that's always caught my eye.
(AEMILIA and SERVILIA pretend to look at a fresco while they eavesdrop on PAULUS and CATO)

PAULUS

Salve, Marcus! (kisses CATO on both cheeks) Still boycotting the baths, I see.
Do I detect a hint of Father Tiber?
(PAULUS and CATO sit)

CATO

Indeed. Esteemed Paulus, I have come to you,
To speak of matters grave and confidential.
My deep concern, dear Paulus, lies within
The prospect of Varro's quest for power,
Should he for consul run and chance to win,
I fear the consequences for our Rome.

PAULUS

Cato, my friend, your words do strike me odd,
For in the public eye, it seems you stand
As Varro's staunchest ally, firm and true.
What stirs within, that prompts this change of heart?

CATO

Indeed, I've backed Varro, for the crowd
Adores him, and his charm aids my designs.
I deemed him harmless, for I ne'er believed
The Senate would approve his path to consul.

Yet whispers now abound, that Varro nears
A deal to gain their favor and ascent,
And should this come to pass, I must confess,
My worry grows for Rome's uncertain fate.

PAULUS

What pact is Varro forging to secure
The Senate's favor and a chance at consul?

CATO

My lips are sealed, dear Paulus, for to speak
Would compromise the trust I've sworn to keep,
To my informant who has shared this news.
Forgive me, for I cannot risk their name.

PAULUS

Then, Cato, tell me, what course do you propose,
To counteract this plan of Varro's making?

CATO

It may be that we cannot halt his rise,
For Varro's popularity stands strong,
Yet, we may seek to temper his command,
By pairing him with one of prudent mind.

A co-consul sensible and wise,
To keep in check his reckless tendencies,
And guide our Rome with steady hand and heart,
Thus, we may still preserve our state's well-being.

PAULUS

You have such a sage candidate in mind?

CATO

I shall speak plain, esteemed Paulus, and true,
My hope is that you'll stand for consul's post,
Your wisdom, courage, and your steady hand,
Would serve to balance Varro's wilder ways.

PAULUS

Cato, my friend, I am no longer young,
My days of seeking valiant soldier's death
Have passed me by, this I gladly accept.

To die in bed, surrounded by my kin,
Is now the fate I cherish and prefer,
For glory's call has faded from my heart,
And peace and family I now hold dear.

CATO

Paulus, my friend, consider this with care,
Your battlefield experience is vast,
And 'gainst the cunning Hannibal, such skill
Is worth far more than youthful zeal and might.

You spoke in Senate, backing Fabius' plan,
And cherished our Republic's sacred ways,
These values Varro scorns, but you uphold,
Thus, Rome would benefit with you as consul.

PAULUS

Your praise is kind, but I must say,
In Rome, there are many men who share
These qualities you've noted, not just I,
Our city's rich with talent, brave and true.

(CATO stands)

CATO

My friend, there are far fewer than you think,
Such men with wisdom, courage, and resolve.
I ask, Paulus, that you contemplate this,
For the election looms, much nearer than supposed.

(CATO leaves the study and sees
AEMILIA and SERVILIA admiring
the fresco)

CATO

Aemilia, word has reached me that you plan,
To speak against the Lex Oppia at the Comitia.

AEMILIA

I do intend to speak my mind.
I know that you will speak in favor of this law,
And I respect your right to do so with fervor.

CATO

But tell me, would it not be more proper,
For your dear husband to stand in your stead?

Tell me, is Scipio too timid or meek,
To advocate for his beloved wife?
Or does he, perhaps, lack the will or talent
To champion her cause in public forum?

AEMILIA

(smiles)

My husband? No, he is most, most skilled. But

To Scipio, I leave the fearsome foe,
The Carthaginian, who doth trouble Rome.

But rest assured, I am well-equipped
To face the likes of you, in matters grave.

Know that I, a woman, have a voice, Senator,
As strong and firm as any man in Rome.
For in my heart, a fire burns as bright,
And with my words, I seek to quench injustice.

My husband's love and trust, I hold most dear,
And in this fight, we stand as one, united.
So doubt me not, nor question my intent,
For in this cause, I am my own defender.

CATO

Aemilia, if you think I hate your sex,
You misconstrue my aim and Lex Oppia.
'Tis not disdain that fuels my firm belief,
But reverence for the roles you've held of old,
Within the sanctum of your Roman homes.

I seek to guard your chastity, prized and pure,
By urging modesty in dress and mien.
For it is not as baubles for men's eyes
That I would see you valued.

It is in honor, Aemilia, not scorn,
That I promote the Lex, and in so doing,
Strive to preserve your dignity and worth.

AEMILIA

Cato, I thank you for your care and thoughts,
To shield our modesty and guard our virtue,
Yet, know that we, as women, hold the power
To regulate our actions, wants, and needs,
And oft with greater skill than many men.

But your words suggest discomfort, deep and strong,
With matters of desire and sensuality,
A stance that seems to clash with Roman ways,
Which oft embrace the passions of the flesh.

CATO

(scoffs)

I suppose both Aemilia and Servilia,
By will of swift Mercury, of course,

Have heard what I said about Varro's ambition,
And the potential path to consulship ahead.
What are your thoughts?

AEMILIA

(laughs)

Though your faith in Varro stands quite firm,
I hope the Senate will not share your view.
His path to consulship may not be smooth,
For many hold him in a doubtful light.

CATO

(smirks)

My lady Aemilia, do not doubt,
In politics, oft strange bedfellows make.
What once seemed distant, now may draw quite near,
For in pursuit of power, loyalties shift.

Unlikely sources may provide support,
When mutual gains are dangled like ripe fruit.
Your father-in-law, Cornelius, knows this well;
For in this game, convictions bend and sway.
Thank you for your hospitality, as always.

(CATO exits)

SERVILIA

Aemilia, sister, I must say, I do admire
Thy self-restraint in facing Cato's words.
For had you not been present by my side,
I fear I might have chided him for hours,

His ceaseless quest to keep us in our place,
To marginalize the women of our Rome,
Would surely fuel my anger, and my tongue
Would not have known the limits of my ire.

AEMILIA

Indeed, his politics I do abhor,
And as a man, he's scarce endeared to me.

Yet at Lake Trasimene, he fought and bled,
And barely did he flee with life intact.
My father speaks of him with high regard,
A soldier brave, who's faced the jaws of death.

And so, I must respect him for his deeds,
For virtue may exist in such a man,
Though his beliefs may be misguided, too.

A man may stand as ally in the Senate,
And yet, in private life, possess no virtue.

That mention of my father-in-law, it weighs
Upon my thoughts, and causes me unease.
What did he mean by such a cryptic phrase?

I shall ask my dear Scipio
If he might shed some light upon this matter.
And if he knows not, I shall implore
That he investigate, and find the truth.
For in this web of words and veiled intent,
I fear that hidden dangers may yet lie,
And secrets kept may threaten all we hold dear.

(BLACKOUT)

(END SCENE 4)

(END ACT I)

ACT II

Scene 1

SETTING: Cornelius's home (atrium). A fresco of Ouroboros on the wall. A small column displays a marble bust of an ancestor. A gladius sword in front of it, on display.

AT RISE: Scipio is entering his childhood home, looking around.

SCIPIO

(looking at marble bust)

Three names we share, my father and I—
Publius, Cornelius, Scipio, all in line.
Such are our fathers, that we sons must bear
Their names, as if mere shadows, and not our own.

In war he was, and absent through my youth,
I'd feel resentment, anger at his leave.
When home, a stranger cold and distant seemed,
A god remote, or enemy most fierce.

I swore I'd be a different man than he,
Not soldier, nor in politics entwined.
Yet in marriage scarce a year, my dear Aemilia,
I failed to comfort her in deepest loss.
She miscarried, our first child gone too soon,
And I, like father, was not there to mourn.

(Picks up the sword and gazes at
it as he speaks)

I thought we dreamt our destinies, and then,
With will and purpose, made ourselves complete.
But now I see the choices that define,
Are, at times, those we least desire to make.
Forced by the hand of fate or circumstance,
These few choices carve our lives.

(Puts the sword down and looks
at fresco)

Perhaps forgiveness lies within my grasp,
For wounds of war are not all seen by eye.
As Ouroboros consumes itself in time,
May I break free and forge a life anew.

(Calling)
Father, I call to you! Are you at home?
(CORNELIUS and PAMPONIA enter,
smiling)

CORNLIUS

Ah! There is my son!

PAMPONIA

My dearest son, how wonderful to see you!
Your presence brings such warmth into my heart.
(Scipio kisses both on each
cheek)

SCIPIO

(suspicious)
Father, why do you seem so happy now,
When oftentimes you are so full of gloom?

CORNELIUS

Is not the sight of thee, my son, enough?

SCIPIO

No.

PAMPONIA

How fares dear Aemilia, your sweet bride?
Doth she yet bear a child within her womb?
We long to see more precious grandchildren,
The fruits of love, the future of our line.

SCIPIO

'Tis possible she may be with a child,
Yet certainty remains beyond our grasp.
We cherish every moment side by side,
Before the call to arms takes me away.

PAMPONIA

(laughs)
Delight in the creation of new life,
For, truly, it's the sweetest part of all.

SCIPIO

(laughs)
I stand so advised, mother.

PAMPONIA

My dearest Scipio, pray tell, what brings you

To visit us here in our humble abode?

SCIPIO

(to CORNELIUS)

I've heard it whispered, rumors faint and strange,
That thou mightst let Varro run for consul's place.
This notion seems but folly to my mind,
For well I know the enmity you share,
And how he scorned thee as consul.

Despite our differences, I trust thy love
For Rome runs deep; thou wouldst not blindly risk
To place a demagogue so near to power.

(CORNELIUS turns away)

Tell me these rumors are false, father. Please.

PAMPONIA

Wine! Let's all have some wine. (calling) Wine!

CORNELIUS

(sighs)

Son, listen well before you judge my choice,
For reasons weigh upon this path I take.
Though Varro's words did wound me in the past,
A way to mend our Rome in him I see.

(SCIPIO stares at his father
with suspicion. SLAVE enters
with wine and cups. CORNELIUS
and SCIPIO refuse. PAMPONIA lets
the SLAVE pour her cup and takes
the amphora from her.)

SCIPIO

Father, in sooth, the dangers Varro bears
Are plain to see for any man with sense.
A serpent coiled, prepared to strike at Rome,
His thirst for power an ever-present threat.

I beg thee, father, share with me the cause
Of this abrupt and curious change of heart.
What could have swayed thy steadfast, cautious mind
To grant him leave to vie for power, and risk our Rome?

CORNELIUS

Son, if we deny him chance to join the race,
A danger we may not control may grow,
His restless spirit stirring up his base,
And Rome, thus weakened, left to pay the cost.

SCIPIO

Our Senate's role, as guardians of Rome,
Is to restrain the passions of the crowd,
Lest Rome, like Athens, falls to demagogues,
And chaos reigns where order once prevailed.

CORNELIUS

His sway among the masses draws them close,
A chance for unity in troubled times,
And as a consul, with his voice subdued,
His influence restrained by wiser thoughts.

(PAMPONIA puts the amphora down
and steps between CONELIUS and
SCIPIO)

PAMPONIA

(to SCIPIO)

My son, attend thy father's sage advice,
For he hath seen the perils Rome hath faced,
And guided her through tempests dark and dire.
In his long years of service, wisdom gained,
And seasoned skill in navigating strife.

Thy youth, though filled with passion, lacks the scope
Of understanding politics' complex weave.
Let not thy heart be clouded by mistrust,
But trust his hand to guide us all to peace.

SCIPIO

Dear mother, I do see your heart's intent,
To further father's rise, his status gained.
But we must weigh our aims with Rome's own good,
And not let blind ambition cloud our sight.

(steps past PAMPONIA, staring
his father down)

What did Varro promise thee, dear father,
That thou wouldst not oppose his bid for power?

CORNELIUS

Varro and I, in earnest conversation,
Deemed that in Hispania I might serve
The interests of Rome most capably.
There, I shall take command alongside Calvus,
My leadership, as needed, will extend,
To keep our enemy's advances checked.

SCIPIO

(Laughs bitterly)

Oh, how the truth now dawns upon my mind,
A bitter laugh escapes my saddened heart.
My uncle Calvus, strong in Hispania,
He needs you not; his victories speak clear,
Yet still you seek to cross the sea and fight,
To wash the stain of Ticinus' loss.

(CORNELIUS points a warning
finger at SCIPIO)

CORNELIUS

Take heed, my son, of words you choose to speak,
In times past, we have had our differences.
But since the Ticinus battle, we've sought
To mend the rifts and find a common ground.
Let not this cause new discord 'tween us, Scipio.

SCIPIO

You're right, father. I did not perceive
The reasons for your actions as a youth,
But only as not the father I desired.
Yet just when I thought I grasped the sacrifice,
The time you spent away for family's sake,
I find 'twas not for duty's call you heeded,
It was ambition's siren song you heard all along.

PAMPONIA

My son, I ask that you listen to your father,
And give him the benefit of the doubt.
His wisdom and experience should not be ignored,
For he speaks from a place of love and care.

Though you may not always agree with his views,
Remember that he only seeks what's best for you.
So I implore you to consider his words,
For in his wisdom lies a wealth of knowledge,
And in his love for you, a force of great strength.

SCIPIO

(Facing PAMPONIA)

Mother, I stand before you, wrought with pain,
For I can bear these selfish acts no more.
A father's duty, first to kin and Rome,
Is cast aside for his own sordid gain.

This paterfamilias, our guiding star,
Yet squanders trust and honor as the wind
Doth blow away the fleeting sands of time.
His choices mar the noble name we bear.

No more shall I defend his errant ways,
His blind ambition, how it dims our light,
And casts a shadow o'er the love we've shared.
I weep, as Rome does weep, for what is lost.

CORNELIUS

(angry)

How dare you speak of sacrifice and duty,
Boy, when you know so little yet?
A single campaign marks your unscarred brow,
And you presume to lecture seasoned men?

Your words betray your youth and arrogance,
As heedless as a foal upon the field.
No grasp of what it means to serve our Rome,
To bear the heavy burden of her fate.

You stand before me, brash and insolent,
Your pride unchecked, your tongue untamed by age.
What right have you to question or defy
The choices made by those who've borne the weight?

Take heed, young Publius, of your errant ways,
And learn the value of humility.
A time will come when you may understand
The sacrifice and duty that Rome demands.

SCIPIO

Vain, selfish, weak - these words I give to you,
For in pursuit of glory, you forsake
The ones who love you, leaving us behind,
While chasing shadows of a fleeting fame.

As selfish aims corrupt our bond and trust.
I leave you to your fate and pray you find
Some peace in distant lands and battles fought,
While here, I strive to heal the wounds you've caused.

PAMPONIA

Stay, Publius, my son, do not depart,
But let us speak and mend these fractured bonds.

SCIPIO

Dear mother, Pamponia, pray, stay your hand,
For I must leave this place, this suffocating air.
With heavy heart, I bid you now farewell.

(SCIPIO exits)

(BLACKOUT)

(END SCENE 2)

Scene 2

SETTING: Campus Martius (military parade and training ground).

AT RISE: A massive Roman army is assembling out of view. We hear the sounds of men training with wooden swords and shields, shouts of their instructors in the distance, etc.

(Horns. Enter a HERALD.)

HERALD

Hark, soldiers of Rome, and lend your ear,
For now approaches two of mighty rank.
Make way, make way, for consuls proud and great,
Lucius Aemilius Paulus, Gaius Terentius Varro near.

(Varro enters in splendid armor)

In splendor they arrive, our leaders bold,
To guide our Rome through trials yet untold.
With wisdom, strength, and honor they shall stand,
To lead our people and protect our land.

So raise your voice in praise, and bow your head,
As consuls Paulus and Varro make their tread.
With fasces borne by lictors at their side,
In Rome's great name, they step with steadfast stride.

(Herald exits, Paulus enters in uniform)

PAULUS

It is customary to wait for your fellow consul, Varro.

VARRO

Behold, Paulus, the sight before our eyes,
A testament to my own grand design.
I've raised an army, vast as seas and skies,
The greatest Rome has witnessed in her time.

One hundred thousand soldiers, strong and fierce,
To challenge Hannibal and strike him down.
I've kept my promise, built a force unmatched,
No other general can claim such feat.

I, Varro, architect of this vast host,
Shall lead them forth to conquer and to claim.
No foe can stand before our boundless might,

And Rome shall sing my praises evermore.

And tell me, Paulus, do you think the Senate,
Impressed by this great army I've amassed,
Will grant me soon a triumph, long desired,
To celebrate our victory in Rome?

To march through streets with laurels on my brow,
The people cheering, raising me on high,
With spoils and praise to mark my lasting fame,
And Rome's eternal debt to my command.

PAULUS

Varro, temper well your eager thoughts,
For triumphs are not granted ere the fight.
'Tis victory that earns such grand acclaim,
And we have yet to face our foe in battle.

Let us first lead these legions, sixty thousand strong,
To clash with Hannibal and prove our worth
With courage, skill, and Rome's great fate in hand.

VARRO

Nay, Paulus. A hundred thousand, I count.

PAULUS

By the count of anyone else, sixty.

VARRO

I shall, my friend, request each soldier's vow,
An oath to heed the orders of the consuls.
By name, they'll pledge their loyalty to me - er, to us,
Their faith in Varro and Paulus affirmed.

PAULUS

My Varro, let us not forget the truth:
They pledge their loyalty to Rome, not men.
To follow orders of those placed above,
Their duty to the state, and not to names.

VARRO

I oft do wonder why these men enlist,
For pay is meager, danger ever near.

PAULUS

It comes as no surprise to me, Varro,
That soldiers' hearts and minds elude your grasp.

VARRO

One of them approaches now.

(Enter CORNELIUS in uniform and
PAMPONIA. CORNELIUS salutes.)

Hail, Cornelius! Dear Pamponia.

CORNELIUS

Most noble consuls, Varro and Paulus,
I come to you with news of our brave men.
Prepared they stand, with spirits high and strong,
To march to Ostia, the sea to cross.
Their hearts are steadfast, ready for the call,
To board the ships and sail for Hispania's shore.

VARRO

But tell me, Cornelius, why the gloom?
Is this not what you sought, your heart's desire?

CORNELIUS

Indeed, it is, and yet my heart does ache,
For Pamponia, children, and grandkids dear.

PAMPONIA

My dearest love, I'll miss you as you go,
The ache within my heart will ever grow.
But like the Vestal Virgins, we remain,
To tend the hearth and keep the sacred flame.

In Rome we stand, your steadfast counterpart,
While you, in distant lands, must play your part.
For we, as guardians of our home and kin,
Shall wait with hope, your safe return to win.

And so, my love, as you to battle ride,
In strength and courage, let your heart confide.
With every step, know we are by your side,
Through love and duty, Rome's eternal bride.

(They embrace. PAMPONIA exits.)

PAULUS

Pray thee, Cornelius, tell me,
Have you mended things with young Scipio?

CORNELIUS

Despite my efforts, progress none I've made,
Young Scipio refuses still my hand.
He stands unbending, and I must confess,
His words were true, though pride I dare not shed.

Yet, as a father, I shall not concede,
 For we are not as equals, son and sire.
 He must learn humility, accept his place,
 And know that wisdom comes with age and grace.

PAULUS

In knowing Scipio, I see his heart,
 Though slow to pardon, prideful in his ways.
 Yet time and distance, letters sent with care,
 Shall mend the rift that lies 'twixt you and him.

I trust his love will grow, as will his mind,
 And in due course, the bond you seek, you'll find.
 With patience, father, let this journey start,
 For deep within, your son still holds you in his heart.

CORNELIUS

I trust your words, Paulus, and pray you're right,
 That time shall heal and mend our fractured bond.
 (Varro takes Cornelius aside)

VARRO

My friend, I understand the pain you bear,
 For I, too, have two sons, both dull and slow.
 No skill to manage e'en a slaughterhouse,
 They squander wealth, in revelry they wallow.

Awaiting my demise, to claim my work,
 They dream to rule the empire I have built.
 We hope our sons shall rise to match their names,
 But oft they fall, and disappoint our aims.

Despite the riches spent on their pursuits,
 Their education, time, and all our care,
 Some sons may never reach the heights we scaled,
 Nor grow to be the fathers we've become.

CORNELIUS

Indeed, I've met your sons, dear Varro, true,
 And I concur, they seem a hapless pair.
 Despite our best endeavors, sons may not
 Attain the greatness of their fathers' deeds.

Yet sometimes, just sometimes, despite all
 We do, they're better than we could ever be.

VARRO

Your words confound me, Cornelius.
What meaning hides behind your speech?

CORNELIUS

(smiles)

It means I'm lucky.

(salutes)

Farewell, dear consuls, Fortune on your side,
And may victory and glory be your guide.

(CORNELIUS exits)

VARRO

(motions toward troops)

A hundred thousand!

PAULUS

Sixty.

(a TRIBUNE enters, salutes)

PAULLUS

Report, Tribune.

TRIBUNE

Consuls, now adding twenty thousand Socii Alae,
Our force numbers eighty thousand strong.

VARRO

Wrong, Tribune! Very wrong!
A hundred thousand men have I.

TRIBUNE

Nay, sir. Eighty thousand.

VARRO

Did you count them?

TRIBUNE

No, sir.

VARRO

Then how know you, they number not a hundred thousand?

TRIBUNE

With respect, Consul; math.

VARRO

Tribune, I fire thee.

PAULUS

Tribune, let us prepare the men to take their oath.

TRIBUNE

Yes, Consul.

(TRIBUNE leaves with Paulus.
CATO enters, salutes.)

CATO

Consul Varro, hail!

VARRO

Tribune Cato! Indeed, a Consul, as promised.
How goes the training?

CATO

Varro, these soldiers, fresh to war's harsh clime,
Our centurions' worries justified.
Their limbs untrained, their hearts untested yet,
To bear the weight of arms in forced march strains.

Their bodies must we forge, as iron strong,
And guide their minds, as tacticians wise.
Swift training may endanger what we seek,
In haste, our Roman virtues compromised.

VARRO

Cato, your fears misplaced, I must dismiss,
For numbers vast shall render us supreme.
No need for perfect skill when force prevails,
We'll overwhelm the foe with iron tide.

Did I not vow in my campaign to fight
The Carthaginian scourge that haunts our land?
Varro will not delay nor defer this task.

If still you fret for discipline and rank,
Then let the tribunes swear them to their post.
An oath anew, pledging on pain of death,
To hold their lines 'gainst fear's relentless grasp.

The battle nears, and with it, victory,
No time for further training we possess.
We must advance and seize our promised fate,
As numbers, Cato, shall secure my triumph.

CATO

Your will, Varro, I shall heed and pass,
For in your trust I stand, a loyal friend.

The comitia tributa soon convenes,
To weigh the import of the lex Oppia.

VARRO

And have you, Cato, honed your speech with care,
To sway their minds and win support for law?

CATO

Indeed, my words are poised to pierce the heart,
Yet in the forum, yours did much persuade.
I reckon that our votes shall now abound,
Securing passage of the law we seek.

VARRO

Good fortune, Tribune.

CATO

And to you, Consul.
(CATO smiles widely as VARRO
chuckles, pleased. CATO salutes
and exits)

VARRO

Behold this sea of men, now bound to me,
Their fates entwined with mine, a mighty host.
How strange that even Rome's elite must heed
My voice, their sneers replaced by feigned respect.

In other lands, mere coin defines the great,
Yet Rome, in fickle whims, doth raise the bar.
With education, art, and virtue claimed,
They fashion standards just to suit their needs.

"Merit," they cry, as if it were a shield,
That they, the architects, doth wield with skill.
And thus, they stand atop the heap they've built,
While common folk are left to scrape and bow.

Yet love, unbidden, springs from those below,
For I have shown them paths untrod before.
With wealth and rhetoric, the world's enthralled,
And fame, sweet fame, confers its potent might.

Do they, these scornful lords who now obey,
Perceive the lesson that I've laid so bare?
I doubt they'll learn, entrenched in their ways,
But still, I'll bask in triumph while they bow.

(BLACKOUT

(END SCENE)

Scene 3

SETTING: Forum.

AT RISE: The audience is in the place of
the Comitia Tributa. The rostrum
is empty.

(BAEBIUS, Tribune of the Plebs,
mounts the rostrum.)

BAEBIUS

(to audience as Comitia Tributa)

Good people, gather close and lend your ear,
This forum's noise, I pray you, quell and clear.
I now present a voice that you should heed,
Aemilia, daughter of Consul Paulus indeed.

Against the Lex Oppia she stands to speak,
With wisdom in her words, and thoughts unique.

(AEMILIA enters and mounts the
rostrum)

AEMILIA

(to audience as Comitia Tributa)

Good people of the Comitia Tributa,
I stand before you now, a voice of truth,
To plead against the Lex Oppia's cruel grip.
This law, unjust and harsh, would seek to bind
The hands of freeborn women in our Rome.

Remember well the struggles of your past,
When plebeians fought for rights 'gainst patricians' might.
Now see how far we've come, where names mean naught,
And freedom's march, relentless, shapes our world.

Yet Lex Oppia would halt this progress, friends,
By claiming half our populace unfit
To guide their lives, their property, their fates.
This law would stifle us, impose its chains,
And halt the steady march of liberty.

Recall our history, a tale of strength,
When woman, violated by a god,
Gave birth to Rome's great founders, Romulus and Remus.
And how our Republic rose, when Lucretia,

Raped by a prince, ignited hearts aflame.

Justice for women is for all a boon,
For when we strike at liberty for some,
We threaten all, as rights and freedoms wane.
The first assault begins with women's lives,
And thus, we all must stand and guard our cause.

I urge you, men of Rome, to act as Brutus,
And those brave senators who joined his cause,
Protect the women, shield them from this harm,
And in so doing, save your rights as well.
For in this fight for justice, Rome's heart beats,
And only through our unity shall we prevail.

(AEMILIA gets down and stands
beside the rostrum)

BAEBIUS

Now, noble Romans, lend attentive ear,
As Marcus Cato takes the stage to speak,
Esteemed senator, he stands before,
In favor of the law we now critique.

(CATO enters and mounts the
rostrum)

CATO

Fellow Romans, hear me out this day,
For I implore thee to support a bill,
That will defend what we cherish and hold dear,
And restore men's dignity, against Hellenic will.

Rome, our great empire, has undergone much change,
And some amongst us feel as though we've lost our way.
The Hellenized elites have slowly taken from us,
Seeking to mold Rome into something stranger each day.

Little by little, they've stripped us of our rights,
And sought to change the very fabric of our great city.
But we cannot let them succeed, nor stand by idly,
As they make Rome unrecognizable, without pity.

The Lex Oppia won't change everything at once,
But it's a start to fight back against the tide.
It will restore men's control over the sacred spaces,
Of the Roman family, where our honor and dignity reside.

For too long, we've let permissive Etruscan culture reign,

And influence our traditions and way of life.
It's time to take a stand and make a change,
To defend what's ours and put an end to this strife.

So I ask you, fellow Romans, to support this bill,
And join me in this fight to restore our way.
Let us honor our traditions and defend our families,
And make Rome great again, come what may.

BAEBIUS

Now, fellow Romans, the time has come to vote,
Let your voices be heard, and make a stand.
Decide the fate of this important bill,
And shape the future of our great land.

(Spotlight dims on all
characters except AEMILIA, who
remains brightly illuminated,
drawing the audience's focus
solely on her.)

AEMILIA

A curse upon this wretched day, wherein
The heart of Rome doth split and tear asunder.
By but a narrow margin, men with hearts
So hardened, cruel, blind, and ignorant,
Strip rights from half the free citizens of Rome.
And what, I ask, hath brought them to this pass?
Their base and vulgar fears, like fire within.

For I have sought to be a voice for change,
To bring a balm of fairness to the soul
Of Rome, to challenge all who dare to bind
The lives of those who should be free as air.
Yet, in this quest, I find no solace, none,
For those who stand with Varro look upon
My face and scorn the heart that beats within.
They see me not as sister, friend, or peer,
But as a serpent, lurking in the dark,
Whose venom threatens all they hold most dear.

And as I bear this burden, heavy as stone,
I find my heart still bleeds, a well of grief
For that which I have lost, that fragile life
Which vanished ere it had a chance to bloom.
And now, another life doth quicken in me,
And dread and terror, like twin harpies, claw
At my frail heart. For should my child be born

A daughter, what awaits her in this Rome?

My husband, Scipio, valiant, just, and kind,
Is far from me to face a most lethal foe.
And father too, by duty's call, prepares
To stand with him against the fearsome Hannibal.
Two wars we fight, divided by our tasks,
One waged upon the battlefield, with steel
And blood, the other in the hearts of men.

For I and mine must wage a war for Rome,
Against those petty tyrants who would hold
Dominion over women's lives and minds.
And in this fight, I find myself bereft
Of those I love, the ones I need the most,
To stand by me when shadows gather near.

Thus, in the midst of strife and sacrifice,
I question if this Rome, besieged by doubt,
Is truly worth the pain and tears we shed.
For what is Rome, if not the sum of all
Our lives, our loves, our hopes and dreams combined?
And if it fail to recognize the worth
Of half its citizens, is it a Rome
Worthy of the blood and loss we suffer?

And so I ask, can any voice be heard,
That cries for justice in the wilderness?
Or must it sink, like pebbles in a pond,
Its ripples lost amid the cruel waves?
For now I doubt the strength that once did burn
Within my breast, as doubt and grief do close
Their dark and icy grip around my soul.
And in this hour, I find no cause for hope,
But only tears and sorrow without end.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE 3)

Scene 4

SETTING: Roman Army Camp near Cannae.

AT RISE: Scipio is in his tent, alone,
setting up his sleeping area.

(PAULUS and VARRO enter. VARRO
looks haggard.)

VARRO

Paulus, why must we be camping in heat,
In this, the hottest month of all the year?
Why did we not engage when temps were mild?
My triumph too, still hangs in limbo's grip,
Despite my service to the state and Rome.
Have I not planned and marshaled men to fight,
Inspiring them to take the field with pride?

Yet still, the Senate shows its bias clear,
Denying me my just and rightful place
Among the honored names of Roman lore.
And as if this were not enough to bear,
These soldiers, needy, clamor for their due,
Demanding arms and training to be paid.
They ask for food and drink, and places safe
To rest their weary heads at end of day.

Ungrateful wretches, all! I've done my part,
Why can they not perceive the work I've done?
My guidance misconstrued as tyranny,
It weighs upon my spirit and resolve.
If Rome cannot reward her loyal sons,
Then let her fall, and be consigned to dust.

PAULUS

Varro, these soldiers need our guiding hand,
Their care is but a small price we must pay.
If we attend to them, they'll be our shield,
And fight with might to keep our foes at bay.

VARRO

I cannot fathom why we wait
To take the battle to our hated foe.
In hills you balked, in forests you demurred,
And now, in plains, you still do hesitate.

Where will you have us fight, on mountains high,
Or in the depths of oceans far below?
Our time is running short, our chance is now,
And yet, you stand here, motionless.

PAULUS

No, this place is not the ground we seek,
For Cannae's fields are open, treeless, wide,
And perfect for the Numidians' skill.
Our cavalry, mostly from allied lands,
Is green, untested, while our foes are skilled,
And number more than we can hope to match.

We cannot fight on terms that favor them,
But must instead wait for the field of war
To tilt in our direction, to our might.
The Roman heavy infantry, our pride,
Is strong and steady, with a will to win,
And when the time is right, they'll show their worth.

So bide your time, and wait for fortune's turn,
For rashness now will lead us to defeat.

VARRO

The Senate, wise in their decree, ordain'd
That we divide not our united force;
One day to thee, the next to me is giv'n.
This day was thine, I yielded to thy lead;
But, mark me, Paulus, on the morrow's dawn,
I shall take charge, our men in ranks array'd.
Should I decide to strike, expect the same,
No interference, as I gave to thee.

(SOLDIER enters, salutes)

SOLDIER

Consul Paulus, message from the Senate, sir.
(Hands PAULUS a message,
salutes, leaves)

VARRO

A message, surely, sent for us, no less,
To both our ears, the Senate's will conveyed.
I ask thee, Paulus, share with me their words,
What sacred counsel would they have us heed?

PAULUS

(reading)

Varro, my friend, the tidings I bear now

Are grim, and fraught with pain, a bitter blow.
From Hispania comes the grievous word,
Betrayal's sting, our trust in allies erred.

Legates Cornelius, Calvus, both in battle slain,
Their blood now mingles with Iberian rain.
The Carthaginians, by false friends embold'nd,
Our noble leaders' lives now cruelly stol'n.

(VARRO pats PAULUS on the back
and backs away)

VARRO

(aside)

Tomorrow I am in command of all,
And I shall seize this chance with iron grip.
Paulus, consumed by grief and thoughts of home,
Shall be my shield, my cover, and my stone.
For while his mind is elsewhere, mine is set
On Hannibal, and how to bring him down.

No more shall we delay, or wait for chance,
But strike while iron's hot, and seize the day.
Our foe is strong, but Rome is stronger still,
And I shall be her sword, her shield, her will.
So let the news of death weigh on his soul,
While I, with boldness, take the final goal.

(VARRO exits.)

PAULUS

Oh, Cornelius and Calvus, brave and true,
My heart is heavy with the weight of grief.
But still, I must hold fast, and keep control,
For there are young and frightened souls to guide.

Scipio, too, will suffer at this news,
His uncle gone, his heart with grief consumed.
And though he may have been estranged from his father,
The love he had for him will linger on.

(sighs)

He deserves to know, despite the pain it brings,
For truth is better than a shadowed life.
So I must bear this burden on my own,
And hold the fragile fabric of our hope.

(PAULUS enters the tent. SCIPIO
stands, salutes)

PAULUS

Scipio, my son, fret not about command,

For in this hour, I am but family, and friend.

SCIPIO

I would have offered you some wine to share,
But alas, my tentmate drank it all.

PAULUS

Of wine, dear Scipio, we need not care,
But tell me now, have you heard from your father?

SCIPIO

From father, no; but Uncle Calvus wrote,
Their meeting swift, progress against the foe.
In unity, they pressed the Carthaginians,
Each step a victory, two hearts as one.

But more my thoughts incline to Aemilia,
Her gravid state, my heart yearns for her still.
I left her in the care of my mother,
And Greek physician's wise, yet distant, hand.

It weighs upon me, parting from her side,
As life within her grows, as does my pride.
I long to know her state, to be assured,
That mother, child are safe, their bond secured.

PAULUS

Though I do miss Aemilia, well I trust,
In the dear care and those attending her.
Though distance parts us, my heart doth rejoice
In knowing she hath found her place with thee.

But hearken now to wisdom old and sage,
Forgive thy father, not for his own sake,
But for thine own, that thou may'st grow and thrive,
Unburdened by the weight of bitter hate.

For hatred gnaws and festers in the heart,
Like venom coursing through the veins, unchecked,
It wounds the soul and mars the bonds of love
Which hold us fast, in kinship and in trust.

Let go of hate, embrace the healing balm
Of tender mercy and forgiveness, lest
Thy heart be hardened, walls be raised in pain,
And shadows fall upon thine inward light.

Hold close the love of those who matter most,

And with compassion, let thy spirit soar,
Transcending chains of anger left behind,
To nurture all that's good within thy heart.

SCIPIO

I cannot, noble Paulus, grant him grace,
For he hath placed ambition over all.

His thirst for glory did overshadow love,
Both for his family and for our state,
So blindly did he chase his own desires,
He left behind the wreckage of our fragile bond.

How can one pardon such a calloused heart,
That scorned the very pillars of our life,
And led us all to suffer by his hand?
In this, I find forgiveness hard to bear.

PAULUS

Youth often sees the world in stark extremes,
Where black and white, they blur not into gray.

At times, this vision offers clarity,
Yet oft it blinds with self-righteous disdain.
Your father, cold and distant, loved you still,
For he was shaped by his own father's hand.

He strove for greatness, seeking to enhance
His name, his reputation, and his fame.
But know that in these efforts he believed
He worked not just for self, but kin and land.

Cornelius saw his actions as a boon,
A legacy for family and Rome.
So judge him not with harsh, unyielding heart,
But seek to understand his complex soul.

Embrace the lessons learned, both good and ill,
And strive to be a better man, a better son.
Acknowledge that we humans are complex,
Intricate weavings of both dark and light.

I do not seek to justify his deeds,
But rather show that we are all alike:
Imperfect, fearful, prone to greed and pride,
Yet capable of nobleness, and love.

In life's vast tapestry we intertwine
Courage and generosity with flaws,
To shape our ever-changing, complex tale.

SCIPIO

Your counsel, Paulus, wise and true, I'll heed,
I'll strive to do as you have urged me now.
Yet bitterness towards my father grew
From seeds sown deep within my heart of old.
Their roots entwined so tight, I know not where
They first took hold, and thus to cut them out
Shall prove a task both arduous and long.

PAULUS

Young Scipio, the child's heart aches,
Believing that a father's absence stems
From love too weak to keep him by their side.
But know, my friend, the fault lies not with you,
Your father's chill demeanor was his own.
If in your heart you cannot pardon him,
At least release resentment you have held
For feeling less than loved, for in this life,
The burden's weight is far too much to bear.

(Enter CLAUDIUS, salutes)

CLAUDIUS

Good evening, Paulus, honored Consul, hail!
I bid thee peace and blessings on this night.

PAULUS

(standing)

Tribune Claudius, take my place and sit thee down,
For I must leave, and bid you both farewell.

SCIPIO

Good night, Consul, and thank you for your words,
Your wisdom shall be treasured in my heart.

PAULUS

We shall speak more tomorrow.

(Exit PAULUS. CLAUDIUS sits and
finds empty wineskin)

SCIPIO

Alas, dear Claudius, the consul's thirst
Hath emptied our last share of wine tonight.

CLAUDIUS

Little wonder. Our legate brings dire news,
From Varro's hand, a crimson tunic flies
Above his tent at dawn; our fate is sealed.
We'll form for battle, to his whims, we yield.

SCIPIO

Let's pray it is but bluster from his lips,
For even Varro's folly must have bounds;
To fight on open plain seems madness plain,
And surely he'll not risk Rome's fate so ill

CLAUDIUS

Oh, how I long for days when I was naught
But simple cavalryman, following orders true;
A heavy burden weighs upon my chest,
To hold the lives of others in my hands.
Of what concern did you and Paulus speak?

SCIPIO

Fathers, and such.

CLAUDIUS

Ah, Scipio, soon thou shalt become a sire,
A father's mantle thou shalt wear with pride.

SCIPIO

To Juno Lucina, I send prayers,
That thou art right, and fatherhood draws near.
Yet, Claudius, we spoke of my own sire,
Whose shadow lingers in our hearts and minds.

CLAUDIUS

Men's fathers' legacies weigh heavy on their sons,
My own father's fame weighs heavy on me.
He led Roman forces at the Battle of Drapana,
A great naval battle in the last war with Carthage.

The augurs brought sacred chickens on board,
They refused to eat their feed, which the augurs said
Was a horrible omen from the gods and told my father
He should not engage the Carthaginian fleet.

But my father was stubborn, and not very religious.
He said to the augurs that 'if the chickens will not eat,
Then let them drink!' and the chickens, thrown overboard.

(a beat)

SCIPIO

And?

CLAUDIUS

And what?

SCIPIO

Claudius, what's the pith and marrow of thy tale?

CLAUDIUS

Nothing.

SCIPIO

Did your father win the battle?

CLAUDIUS

Gods, no. T'was a disaster, start to finish.
(Scipio lays down to sleep)

SCIPIO

Pray, Claudius, any other tales of wonder?

CLAUDIUS

Oh, did I tell you I was sacked?

SCIPIO

(surprised)
Sacked? When?

CLAUDIUS

Well-nigh four moons past.

SCIPIO

When we were in Rome?

CLAUDIUS

But for a brief span of hours.

SCIPIO

Hours? What mishap came to thee?

CLAUDIUS

No mishap. I did but count the number of the soldiers
At the Campus Martius, and did report
The count unto the consul, then was sacked.

SCIPIO

Thou wert sacked for counting soldiers?

CLAUDIUS

Not for counting, but for reporting the number, I was
sacked.

(They look at one another)

BOTH

Varro.

SCIPIO

Good night, Claudius.

CLADIUS

Rest thee well, Scipio.

(BLACKOUT)

(END SCENE 4)

And tire and falter long before the rest.

VARRO

We'll take turns, rotating our men around,
From inside to the out, and back again.
It is not hard to make such a change,
And it will strengthen us for the coming fray.

But Cato, make no mistake, if this is not done,
I'll find someone who will, and you'll be gone.
I will have my wall.

CATO

Yes, Consul!

(CATO salutes, exits. Enter
PAULUS)

PAULUS

Varro, I must again implore thee, stay
Thy hand from battle with Hannibal's force.
We know not yet why he has offered fight,
And if he has, he's planned how to win the day.

VARRO

Paulus, I feel as though a henpecked spouse,
With thee as wife, and I, the cowering man.
But know this, on this day I lead the charge,
And thou must follow, or be left behind.

It matters not what Hannibal may plan,
For I have strategies far better than his,
And I shall outwit him at every turn,
And bring him to his knees in ignominy.

PAULUS

Varro, if thou art to lead this battle,
Then get thee down amongst the soldiers now,
And ready them for the coming fight ahead.
'Tis time to act, not talk, and make a stand.

VARRO

(incredulous)

Join the army in battle? Not I, Paulus!
My place is here, to oversee the fight,
To guide the troops and issue forth commands,
And not to risk my neck upon the field.

PAULUS

Varro, dost thou not know the Roman way?
Our leaders lead from front, by strength and skill,
And show their valor by example set.
The men must see their leader with them fight.

VARRO

Valuable, indeed, am I to this state,
And my place is not amongst the common men.
But thou art welcome to join them in the fray,
And fight beside them, if thou art so inclined.
(PAULUS gets in his face)

PAULUS

(angry, menacing)
You dare to shirk your duty in this hour,
When Rome's own fate rests on our shoulders, Varro?
'Tis not a time for cowardice or doubt;
Our men need leaders strong and resolute.
Now go!

VARRO

I've done my part to set the stage for victory,
And as for leading men in battle, nay.
A youthful wound still plagues my shoulder, Paulus,
I cannot wield a sword nor face the fray.

PAULUS

Get down there now, you cur!
(VARRO ignores him. PAULUS turns
and storms away in disgust.
SCIPIO enters, salutes PAULUS.)

PAULUS

Scipio, where is thy cohort?

SCIPIO

Consul, something's amiss with this formation,
It makes no sense to me, nor to my men.
My cohort is at the rear of a massive block,
Which seems to stretch across the whole wide glen.

Pray tell, Consul why dost thou lead the charge,
And not Varro, who commands this day's fight?
If this be Varro's plan, then let him lead,
And guide the troops with his commanding hand.

(PAULUS glances at VARRO, then
puts his hand on SCIPIO's
shoulder)

PAULUS

Fight well, my son, uphold our standard high,
For Rome's great honor, and for victory.
Yet, should I fall upon this hallowed ground,
I pray you, care for Aemilia's heart.

Love her with tenderness, with steadfast grace,
In my stead, offer her your strong embrace.
For in your hands, I trust her life and soul,
As you, dear Scipio, I've come to know.

A man of honor, courage, and of strength,
Whose heart beats true, for Rome's eternal flame.

SCIPIO

I beg of thee, Paulus, stay not on the field,
And risk thy life in battle not thy own command.

Please, father-in-law! Thou art Consul!

PAULUS

There are times when a consul's life matters not,
And duty calls us to the front lines of the fight.
I wish thee luck, Scipio, and may the gods guide us.

(SCIPIO and PAULUS exit in
opposite directions. Lights dim
to near darkness. The sound of
battle horns blares, followed by
the cacophony of clashing
swords, screaming soldiers, and
the chaos of war. A single
spotlight shines on Varro and
another on the Roman CENTURION
as they stand on opposite sides
of the stage)

VARRO

I'm certain that my tale of victory at Cannae,
Has echoed through the ages and the centuries past.
And in time, my name has been exalted even higher,
Perhaps the gods themselves have seen fit to make me last.

But just in case there are some who do not know,
I shall use my great voice to tell the tale of my might.
For I, Varro, have fought and triumphed over Hannibal,
And my name shall be forever remembered in the light.

CENTURION

I am but a simple Roman soldier, a Centurion,
Who fought in many battles for the glory of Rome.
But none were as terrible as that day at Cannae,
Which forever in my memory shall have a home.

The screams of the dying and the wounded haunt me still,
As I toss and turn in my sleep with terrors vivid.
No words can describe the horror of that fateful day,
And in my nightmares, I relive the moments most nights.

VARRO

The battle opened with a clash of horse,
As I foresaw and well did calculate.
Our Roman horsemen fought with heart and strength,
And though o'erwhelmed, they struck the foe a blow.

CENTURION

Our Roman cavalry and fresh allies,
Grown pale with fear, did scatter 'fore the charge
Of swift Numidian horse, and offered naught
In way of contest, fleeing from the field.

VARRO

In brave advance, our Roman legions marched,
With strength and courage, met the foe's front line.
We pressed and pushed against their feeble center,
A testament to my command divine.

The Carthaginian lines, they bent and swayed,
But break they would not, like a stubborn bow.
Yet still, my prowess led our mighty force,
And trapped our enemy twixt high and low.

CENTURION

We deemed our march a gain, yet little knew
That deeper we did tread in Hannibal's snare.

His Carthaginian center bent, yet firm
Stood left and right, until we found ourselves
Enveloped, as if in constrictor's coils,
Near circled by the enemy's cunning grasp.

The pincer closed around our Roman ranks,
Our hopes and dreams now crushed by cunning guile.
Deceived, we stood within the tightening grip,
Our lives ensnared within a foe's dark wile.

VARRO

In victory's embrace, I sought my leave,
 With loyal staff, I ventured from the fray.
 For Romans faced the enemy with strength,
 Engaging them on all sides, a masterful display.

To Venusia's welcoming arms, I strode,
 Retired from war's tumultuous embrace.
 My soldiers, left to claim their victory,
 Would etch my name within the annals of grace.

CENTURION

As Varro fled, our desperate plight grew dire,
 Our forces crushed by Carthaginian might.

Then Numidians, swift and merciless,
 Returned upon the field, assailing our rear,
 And we, encircled, found our doom was sealed.
 For in our ranks, no space to breathe or move,
 We stood as trapped, with naught but fate's cruel hand
 To guide us through the bloody fray and strife.
 In ever-shrinking space, near eighty thousand,
 Could scarcely breathe, nor wield a blade to fight.

Our backs to each, no room for egress found,
 The enemy closed in, relentless, fast.
 With hope, a distant memory, we braced,
 For what appeared to be our bitter last.

VARRO

In time, I learned of Paulus' grave mistakes,
 His errors in commanding Roman force.
 I cannot help but think his bitter end,
 Aimed to besmirch my name.

Despite the ill attempts of Paulus, foe
 And others who conspired to mar my triumph,
 My strategy, so grand, unmatched in time,
 Forced victory upon our Roman host,
 A stunning win, ordained by my design,
 The greatest battle plan the world hath known.

CENTURION

My cohort, led by Tribune Scipio, broke free
 From Hannibal's tight snare, and we did charge,
 Resisting fate, we rallied, struck them hard.

But Carthaginians pushed us back, their force
 Unyielding, held the rest of Rome's great host

Encircled, still within the jaws of doom.

With heavy hearts, we fought a running battle,
Retreating to Canusium's safety, finally free.
The Carthaginians, sated by their prey,
Returned to finish off the Roman host.

VARRO

The Roman casualties, I do admit,
Were great, but such is fate by sword incurred.

I claim the victory for Rome's proud name,
And for my part, a triumph I expect.
Outsmarting Hannibal at every turn,
A glorious outcome, none can dare reject.

CENTURION

How dark the day, when sixty thousand fell,
Not in the blaze of glory, but subdued
By brethren's weight, an iron ring of doom.

No clash of steel for many as they faced
Their end, but smothered 'neath the press of Rome.
I once believed in Varro, lion-tongued,
Who seemed to speak the truth midst lies so rife.

For common Romans, such as I, he spoke,
His rhetoric, a balm to our worn hearts.
My friends did warn, he was a charlatan,
Yet I dismissed their words, and stood by him.

In Varro's speeches, I did find delight,
As he assailed elites with barbs so sharp.
But fate did turn and show me bitter truths,
The lion's words, a coward's heart concealed.

'Twas Scipio, a fancy city boy,
Who led me from the jaws of Hannibal.
And Paulus, an elite, did fight and die,
While Varro fled, his courage found to fail.

At Cannae's cost, my eyes were opened wide,
To lies and manipulations deep.
Though life was spared, my very soul was lost,
As Varro blamed the soldiers, we who bled.

His senate friends agreed, and stripped us bare,

To Sicily, they sent us, ghosts to be.
Our honor, dignity, all cast aside,
We languish in the shadows, never free.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE 5)

(END OF ACT II)

ACT III

Scene 1

SETTING: Canusium Forum.

AT RISE: Bandaged wounded roman soldiers rest, eat, and talk among each other. In a house nearby behind closed door are METELLUS, FURIUS and a few other eques, meeting around a table.

(SCIPPIO, looking weary, is walking with a wax tablet and stylus, making notes. CLAUDIUS enters, going in the opposite direction)

CLAUDIUS

My friend, Scipio, I bring news to share,
A mix of fortune's fickle hand, both sweet and sour.
Yet, in these times, I sense the good is craved,
And gladly shall I grant you that reprieve.

SCIPPIO

Oh, Claudius, your timing is most apt,
For in this moment, good news I require.

CLAUDIUS:

In Canusium, the troops have cast their votes,
And they have chosen their new commanders.

SCIPPIO

If this be so, then share the ill-tidings, too.

CLAUDIUS

The ill news is we are those commanders.
In this, we stand as equals, bound by fate,
To bear the weight of Rome upon our backs.
How many men have we?

SCIPPIO

My eyes do scan the field and count the men,

Two thousand strong, or so it seems, and yet,
Less than half their number fit for war,
Prepared to march and fight.

CLAUDIUS

But tell me, Scipio, whence come the means,
To feed and clothe these men, our newfound charge?

SCIPIO

Fortune graces us, at last, in form of Lady Busa,
Wealthy and steadfast friend. My father-in-law's ally,
She lends her wealth to purchase sustenance and garb
For those in need. With open heart, she aids Rome's cause,
The valiant survivors of the dread battle, Cannae.

(SOLDIER enters, salutes)

SOLDIER

Tribunes, hail!
I bring to you a message from afar.
Word has arrived: Consul Varro now
Resides in Venusium, with staff in tow.

CLAUDIUS

(scoffs)

Varro! By the gods... The hapless wonder.

SCIPIO

What course of action should we take?

CLAUDIUS

You have earned the right, as much as I,
To guide our course, to mold our way.
In you, I place my trust and confidence,
For Rome's survival, I shall follow your command.

SCIPIO

(nods)

Good soldier, heed my words and make them swift,
Send word to Varro, let him know our state:
Two thousand soldiers stand with us in strength,
And with his guidance, we shall know our place.

Ask if he wills us journey to Venusium,
Or if he'd rather come to Canusium's grounds.

(SOLDIER salutes and exits)

CLAUDIUS

My friend, have you now taken leave of sense?

To seek Varro's guidance, fraught with risk and ire,
 A man deemed failure, coward, and disgrace,
 Who's led our people to the brink of doom.

Should these embattled soldiers lay their eyes
 Upon the man who's brought them pain and loss,
 They might well rise in anger, seeking blood,
 And I confess, I may be swayed to join.

SCIPIO

But Claudius, what would you have us do?
 For Varro, flawed though he may be, still stands
 As Rome's elected Consul, bound by law.
 Our duty, then, to seek and heed his word.

The law's firm grasp provides our army's spine,
 Without it, discipline and order fade,
 And we, no longer soldiers, armed mobs become,
 A chaos poised to tear our ranks apart.

On edge we teeter, unity at risk,
 And thus, obedience, loyalty we must enforce,
 To chain of command, a bulwark 'gainst the storm.
 For Rome's salvation lies in order's reign.

CLAUDIUS

Yet, Scipio, there are moments when we must
 Acknowledge greater good o'er rigid law,
 Or break its chains when wisdom calls us forth.
 Your own wife, bold, defies the Lex Oppia.

Why not then, turn a blind eye to Varro's claim,
 A Consul marked by folly and missteps?
 Let us not blindly follow his command,
 But weigh the risks and choose a wiser path.

SCIPIO

My wife, she breaks a law deemed unjust,
 And in that act, she stands on righteous ground.
 Yet neither you nor I contest the laws
 That bind our chain of command in sacred trust.

These laws are just, despite our thoughts of Varro,
 Elected by the people's voice, and thus we serve.
 Would you, dear Claudius, wish our soldiers to
 Pick orders to obey, based on their thoughts of us?

In duty's name, we must uphold the law,

And follow Varro's lead, however flawed.
For Rome's survival lies in unity,
And only through obedience shall we prevail.

CLAUDIUS

Curse you, Scipio, and your reasoned words,
That bind my heart in chains I cannot break.
(SOLDIER 2 enters, salutes)

SOLDIER 2

Honorable tribunes, I come to you in confidence.

SCIPIO

Speak, good soldier.

SOLDIER 2

In whispers heard, a plot begins to brew.
Marcus Caecilius Metellus and
Publius Furius Philus, both esteemed eques,
Conspire with others in a home nearby. (points)

Intent to leave our Rome in darkest hour,
To seek a mercenary's life in Greece they plan.
Their loyalty and hearts, now set to wane,
Abandoning our cause when most we need their strength.

SCIPIO

Come.

(SOLDIER 2 leads them to house.
They draw swords. SCIPIO kicks
in the door. The men at the
table put their hands up)

METELLUS

How dare you barge, unbidden, into our midst,
Scipio, with your sword unsheathed and glinting steel?
What madness drives you to disrupt our talk,
And threaten peace with violence in your eyes?

FURIUS

(nervous)

There must be some confusion, good Tribunes,
A tangle in the web of whispered words.
With anxious hearts, we meet to share our thoughts,
Not to conspire against our Rome's best interests.

SCIPIO

Is that the truth, dear Furius, that you speak?

For as I glance upon this gathered crowd,
I see but shame within their downcast eyes,
As children caught in acts of petty mischief.

If honest hearts and loyal minds reside
Within this chamber, let them stand and state
The truth of their intentions, bold and clear.
(waits)

Hear me now, eques, I warn you of the
Price of desertion from our ranks: death.
(Holds sword at METELLUS's
throat)

METELLUS

Scipio, your accusations fly too fast,
For rumors whispered bear not always truth.
Where is your proof that we, in secret, spoke
Of desertion, of betrayal, of such schemes?

SCIPIO

(Takes sword from METELLUS's
throat)

Indeed, Metellus, you may speak the truth,
And I, perhaps, too hasty in my charge.
Let us then find a way to mend this breach.
(Extends point of sword to the
middle of the table)

If honor still resides within your hearts,
And duty binds you to our Rome's great cause,
Then swear before the gods, great Jupiter
And Mars, the mighty guardians of our land,
That you shall never desert Rome's great ranks.
Speak the oath of the equites.
(Eques stand and extend their
swords)

EQUES

We, the eques of Rome, with hearts aflame,
Here swear our loyalty, our lives, our all,
Before the watchful eyes of Jupiter
And Mars, the fearsome guardians of our land.

No force shall bend our will or break our bonds,
No whispered treachery shall sway our hearts.
United, we shall stand by Rome's great side,
Defending her with honor, strength, and pride.

Through battle's fury, and in times of peace,

Our fealty shall never wane nor cease.
To Rome, our sacred duty we renew,
To kin and country, ever we'll be true.

This solemn vow, with gods as witness here,
We pledge, as one, in loyalty sincere.
Together, bound by honor, truth, and might,
We shall defend our Rome, both day and night.

(BLACKOUT)

(END SCENE)

SCENE 2

SETTING: Roman Senate Main Chamber.

AT RISE: CATO is sitting in one of the consul's chairs his feet up on the other. From outside we hear the sound of panic and chaos, wailing, arguments, etc.

(FABIUS enters)

FABIUS

Good Cato, is't thou I see before mine eyes?

CATO

Fabius Maxiumus! Hail!. Pray, wouldst have a drink
While we observe Rome's fiery demise?

FABIUS

In countryside, I dwelt when news did reach
Of Cannae's loss, and swift returned to find
This city gripped by chaos and by fear.
Pray tell me, Cato, what has come to pass,
What dread events have led us to this state?

CATO

From distant hill we watched, Varro and I,
As legions dense and reckless charged the field,
Like thoughtless beasts they rushed to meet their doom,
Compelled by Varro's blundering command.

Hannibal's host, with serpent's cunning skill,
Surrounded them and squeezed the life they held,
As serpents coil 'round hapless prey that's caught,
And Romans fell to Carthaginian might.

But ere the final cries and death knells tolled,
We fled the scene, our hearts with terror gripped,
To safety's arms, where breathless, we did pause,
And there, in disbelief, Varro spoke thus:
"Perchance, good Cato, will the Senate now
Bestow on me a triumph for this day?"

Such folly in that moment I did hear,
I scarce believed a man like him could live.

(CATO shakes his head in
disbelief and drinks more wine.
FABIUS takes the wine from his
hands)

FABIUS

But tell me of the few that lived,
How many souls escaped that fateful day,
And where, I pray, are these survivors now?

CATO

Five thousand, more or less, who stayed behind
At camp, found passage to our Rome once more,
Their lives unscathed by brutal war's embrace.

A few, with fortune's favor, broke the coil,
And made their way to Canusium's walls,
Where refuge in her sturdy arms they sought.

The rest, I fear, have met their final end,
No more to feel the sun's warm rays or taste
The sweetest fruits of life, their names engraved
In dark and bloodied annals of our past.

FABIUS

And what of consuls, guardians of our state?
Where doth Paulus and Varro find themselves,
In this grim aftermath of tragedy?

CATO

Paulus, noble in his steadfast heart,
Desired to share his soldiers' destined fate,
Though not in charge upon that fateful morn.
I deem he lies among the lifeless now,
His final breaths surrendered to the fray.

To Jupiter's great temple Varro went.
He sought the Sibylline Books' counsel,
Though he deems it needless, victory he claims.

From sacred halls, he strode with blame anew,
He faulted Gauls and Greeks for our defeat.
In horror, two of each, one man, one woman,
He ordered seized to bury 'neath the forum
While their hearts still did beat, in sacrifice.

FABIUS

And in this troubled hour,

Where do our fellow senators stand?

CATO

A third of senators, alas, no more,
At Cannae's bloody field, they met their end.
Of those remaining, factions have emerged,
Each striving for their cause in Rome's dark hour.

Against Varro's lies, some rally to defend
The city, should the fearsome Hannibal
Approach our gates with his ferocious force.

While others, blinded by deceit, do aid
Varro's twisted tales, which multiply.
One claims that Varro won upon that day,
Another, Paulus lost, and yet, one more,
That soldiers, in rebellion, followed him,
Disobeying Varro's wise command.

These falsehoods spread like poison through our Rome,
And those who wish to shield him may indulge
In any lie that suits their faith, blind.

FABIUS

But tell me, has Varro's ambition soared,
And called he for a dictatorship's reign?

CATO

Nay, Fabius, Varro's mind is occupied,
With weaving falsehoods of the battle's fate.
He lies and tricks to shirk accountability,
A master of deception, I must say.

For even now, as each in Rome did lose,
A brother, father, son, or cousin dear,
He speaks, and people listen, still believe,
His serpent's tongue, a spell upon their ears.

FABIUS

It is not some great power that he wields,
But rather, what he lacks that grants him sway.
No shame resides within his hollow breast,
He bends the truth and twists the hearts of men.

CATO

In truth, I envy Varro's shameless heart,
For I was there, at Cannae's bloody field.
I followed orders, as a soldier should,

And sent our men to die like pigs, confined,
 In Varro's filthy slaughterhouse of war,
 Sixty thousand lives extinguished, lost.
 This shame I bear, so heavy on my soul,
 I thought to fall upon my sword, in grief.

Fabius, I once believed, as all men do,
 That Varro's heart held truth, and he did see
 The devastation he hath wrought upon
 Our armies and our Rome. But, sad to say,
 This truth evades his grasp, and leaves him blind.

In his eyes, I find an emptiness,
 No trace of guilt, regret, or deep remorse,
 For all the lives now lost to us, who fought
 In service of our fair republic's name.

A third of senators, our noble blood,
 And countless eques fallen on that field,
 Yet all that fills Varro's thoughts and cares
 Are dreams of triumphs, for his own parade.

How can one's heart remain so cold and void,
 Unmoved by loss, as Rome now mourns and weeps?
 This man, whose hubris brought such dire defeat,
 Still seeks the praise and glory he has lost.

(FABIUS puts his hand on CATO's
 shoulder and looks in his eyes.

CATO weeps, then turns away)

Your gaze, dear Fabius, it weighs on me,
 For you, foresighted, warned of this grim fate.
 Your words, like prophecies, now ring so true,
 And I, in anguish, bear this heavy guilt.
 And me, a fool, paid no heed.

FABIUS

No oracle am I, nor mystic seer,
 Yet clear it was that Varro spelled our doom.
 Ambition's grip, it blinded you, dear friend,
 And hid the danger he did pose to Rome.

But glad am I, that on your sword you did not fall,
 For Rome, in need, requires her leaders.
 Together, we must rise from ashes, heal
 The wounds of Cannae, and our land renew.

CATO

Fabius, have you seen the streets outside?
 This chaos, horror, Rome's unraveling?
 Aside from human sacrifice, behold,
 Two Vestal Virgins, vows accused as broken.

One took her life, the other buried, live.
 The Pontifex Maximus, in rage and grief,
 Beat one poor lover to a bloody death.
 Now, women wail, and people flee in fear.

Panic grips our Rome, as Hannibal,
 They dread, may soon descend upon our gates.
 The city crumbles 'fore our very eyes,
 Oh, Fabius, can you not see? Rome falls!

FABIUS

I have not turned a blind eye to our plight,
 For I commanded Marcellus' return,
 From Ostia, where ships for Lilybaeum waited,
 To stand and guard our Rome, now vulnerable.

And of the few who reached Canusium's walls,
 Where have they gone, and what has been their course?
 Do they yet stand, a remnant of our strength?

CATO

Varro met them, but returned with haste,
 To seize the chance to tell his twisted tale.
 He weaves his lies, ensnaring senators,
 To send those men away to Sicily.

He fears their voices, strong with bitter truth,
 Would pierce the web of falsehoods he has spun.
 And so, he schemes to silence them, and hide
 The dark reality of Cannae's field.

FABIUS

Cato, enough of dwelling on this woe,
 For self-pity shall not heal the wounds
 Inflicted on our city and our land.
 I've called upon the Senate, they shall meet
 Upon the morrow, seeking solace, strength.

Our task at hand: to find the aediles,
 And praetors, too, to help restore the peace,
 To quell the chaos born from Varro's deeds,
 And halt his reign of ruin, swift and sure.

With urgency, let us appoint a man,
A strong and just dictator, who shall rise
To face the challenges that lie ahead,
And guide our Rome through these tempestuous times.

Now, Cato, we must rally all our strength,
And march with purpose, undeterred by grief,
For Rome, our home, depends on us this day,
To save her from the brink of dark despair.

CATO

I'll come thee after, anon.

(FABIUS exits. CATO hangs his
head.)

In Varro's shadow now, I find myself,
With selfish acts to shield his blighted name.
And though I know the wrongs he's done to Rome,
My own fate hinges on his tarnished fame.

If he should fall, I too shall be discredited,
My dreams to shape this city into gold,
Dashed upon the rocks of public scorn.

If Varro were of Carthage, crucified he would be,
Yet here in Rome, he's welcomed and embraced,
While citizens, in fear and chaos, turn
Against each other, swallowing the lies
That spew forth from his lips, unchecked, believed.

How can they trust in tales that contradict?
Must I now foster falsehoods for my gain,
To keep from seeming foolish in their eyes?
Shall I, too, speak untruths to sate their ears?

No, not ambition led me to this place,
But love for Rome, for what she once was, grand.
And in that love, I find the greatest virtue,
A vision of our future, bright and strong.

(CATO exits)

(BLACKOUT)

(END SCENE 2)

Scene 2

SETTING: Forum.

AT RISE: VARRO is addressing an unruly and panicked gathering. Two senators, PAETUS and FLAVUS, are among the crowd.

(FABIUS and CATO enter at rear of crowd)

VARRO

(addressing the crowd)

Citizens of Rome, in these dire times,
A state of emergency I declare.
For those who dare to contradict or twist
The truth of Cannae's battle, heed my words:
Such slander is a treasonous offense,
And guilty are they of betraying Rome.

Let it be known that any citizen
Who blackens any consul's name with lies,
Shall face the harshest penalty: the loss
Of life and property, as enemies
Of Rome they shall be branded, forfeiting
Their rights and station as the traitor's due.

By this decree, I urge you all to stand
United with your consuls, and defend
The honor of our noble Rome, against
The treacherous tongues that seek to undermine
The strength and unity that we require
In times of crisis, for the common good.

PAETUS

(from the crowd, defiantly)

Consul Varro, I must protest these words,
No right have you to make such laws by mere decree.
For Rome's foundation lies within her laws,
And in the hands of all her citizens,
Not just the whims of one man's fleeting power.

You speak of strength and unity, and yet
Your actions threaten to divide our Rome,
Suppressing voices that dissent or question.
A consul's role is not to rule by fear,

But lead with wisdom, justice, and respect
 For those who placed you in this honored seat.

VARRO

Paetus, I hear your words, but you forget,
 The other consul's gone, his actions dire,
 He sought to tarnish me, to spoil my victory,
 His life he paid for such a treacherous act.

And thus, I stand alone, a de facto dictator,
 With power to declare emergency measures,
 For Rome now faces threats both far and near.
 In times like these, swift action must be taken,
 To safeguard Rome and all her citizens.

It is not tyranny, but love for Rome,
 That drives me to take measures strong and firm,
 To shield our city from the chaos born
 Of discord, strife, and enemies who lurk
 Within our walls, and seek to tear us down.

FLAVUS

(from the crowd, accusingly)

Varro, the chaos you so fear, it seems,
 Is chiefly caused by your own hand and words.
 You call for human sacrifices, blame
 Entire groups of people for your failings,
 And, in the process, sow the seeds of discord.

PAETUS

Aye, Flavus speaks the truth, and I must add,
 When Flaminius met his end last year,
 Servilius was no dictator then,
 So why should you, Varro, claim such power,
 When you now stand in the same position?

What makes your case so different from before?
 This claim to dictatorship, it seems to me,
 Is but a ploy to consolidate your grasp,
 To stifle opposition, quell dissent,
 And rule by fear, instead of reason's light.

VARRO

Now heed my words, Paetus and Flavus both,
 And weigh with care the charges that you cast,
 For patience wanes among the Roman souls.

Think well before you hurl your bitter claims,

And seek to wound the pride of Rome's great heart,
With false and baseless accusations spun.

Let not your tongues defile this sacred ground,
Where honor dwells and virtue finds its home,
With slander aimed to stain our people's name.

For Rome shall rise and conquer every ill,
And you, who dare to challenge her resolve,
Shall feel the wrath of her indignant ire.

FLAVUS

How bold, O Varro, that you dare to stand
And use the very crisis you begot,
To grasp for power, as if 'twere yours to claim.

Our people suffer by your hand, and yet
You seek to raise yourself above the rest,
To wield the reins of Rome, though stained with guilt.

Beware, for I and others like me know
The bitter truth of your ambitious heart,
And we shall not stand idly by and watch

As you exploit the chaos that you sowed,
To further your own ends and mar our state,
For Rome deserves a leader just and true.

VARRO

(angered)

My patience has been stretched, and now it snaps,
These men, Paetus and Flavus, dare to cross
The very line that holds our Rome in check.
They seek to undermine my rightful power,
To sway the crowd and fan the flames of strife.

Lictors, I order you, arrest these men,
Senators Gaius Aelius Paetus,
And Lucius Decimus Flavus, here and now.
Let all who witness know the price of sowing doubt,
And feel the weight of justice swift and firm.

For Rome's security and future good,
We cannot suffer traitors in our midst,
Their words and actions poison to our state.
This I decree, and thus it shall be done!

(Crowd erupts in fighting)

FABIUS

(interdicting lictors)

Lictors, I say, halt where you stand right now!
 Let not a hand be laid on these good men,
 For they have spoken with their conscience clear,
 And raised concerns that merit deep reflection.

In Rome, free speech has always been our right,
 The cornerstone of our republic strong.
 To stifle it would be to suffocate
 The very air that gives our nation life.

Let us not sacrifice our principles
 Upon the altar of fear and blind obedience,
 For in that path lies tyranny and ruin.
 Now, Varro, stay your hand, and let us talk,
 Resolve our differences through words, not force.

VARRO

(mockingly)

Ah, here's our Fa-Fa-Fa-Fabius, the timid puppy,
 Who chased and yelped, yet never dared to bite.
 You trailed Hannibal through Italy,
 Yet all you did was watch him burn and loot.

Your jealousy now seethes and overflows,
 For I have done what you could never do:
 I faced Hannibal, and Rome's foes felt my wrath.
 You quiver, Fabius, in my shadow's cast,
 Your words are empty, bitter fruits of envy.

And so, I ask, what gives you right to stand
 And question my decisions for our Rome?
 The time for words is past, the time for action,
 To cleanse our nation of the traitors' stench,
 And bring the order back to our fair land.

FABIUS

Varro, the Senate has not granted you
 The mantle of dictator; nor shall they.
 Your arrogance, unchecked, knows not its bounds,
 And yet you lack the wisdom that Rome needs.

Now, lictors, mark my words: do not proceed
 To arrest these senators of noble rank.
 For if you dare to do so, be forewarned,
 When Rome appoints a true dictator just,

You'll face the consequences of your acts.
Cato, my friend, I call on you to speak,
Your wisdom and your strength have long been known.
For Rome, you've always stood as guiding light,
A beacon in the darkness of our strife.

Now let your voice be heard, and share your thoughts,
On Varro's actions, on this path we tread.
For surely, Cato, you can see the truth,
And in your heart, I trust you know what's right.

(CATO looks at Varro, then at
the people. PAETUS and FLAVUS
exit as CATO speaks)

CATO

Good people, hear me now, and heed my words,
For in this time of strife, the truth is scarce,
And yet I stand before you to declare:

While senatorial hands have yet to place
The mantle of dictatorship on one,
Then Varro's claim to power holds some weight.

Elected by the people, not the Senate,
He bears the will of Rome's great populace,
And in the absence of a second consul,
His word, indeed, does hold a certain sway.

I urge you all to honor his decrees,
If only for the sake of unity,
To stave off further chaos, blood, and strife,
Until a rightful dictator is named.

VARRO

Behold, my friends, our senators have fled,
But let it be known, I am not a man
Who bears a grudge or seeks to sow discord.

I am magnanimous, yes, surely so,
Perhaps the most magnanimous of all.
For Rome's sake, I shall pardon these offenses,
Of Senators Paetus, Flavus, and Fabius too.

Let all who witness this event today
Remember well the mercy I display.
For in my heart, I hold the love of Rome,
And in my rule, I strive to keep us whole.

FABIUS

Varro, your pardon, hold it close to heart,
And let it fester, like the venom's dart.
For I have no desire to bow before
A man who'd see our Rome brought to her knees.

VARRO

Farewell, Fa-Fa-Fa-Fabius, I take my leave,
For tasks aplenty lay before my gaze.
And as I toil, I shall deliberate,
Upon the question that consumes my thoughts:

Shall I permit our Senate's gathering,
To convene upon the morrow's light?
Their voices raised, in harmony or discord,
Within those hallowed halls of Rome's great state.

Your presence here has much amused, dear friend,
But now the time has come for parting ways.
For I, the consul, must embrace my duty,
And Rome's well-being keep within my sights.

(VARRO leads guards, crowd away)

CROWD

(chanting)

Var-ro! Var-ro! Var-ro! Var-ro!

(chanting fades, ends)

FABIUS

Cato, I find myself in deep dismay,
For you, a man of valor, courage shown,
On battlefield where death and danger loom,
Today displayed a lapse in moral strength.

What for, dear friend? Mere politics and power,
A fleeting grasp, like sand that slips through fingers.
You sacrificed your virtue, your true self,
In service to ambitions hollow and vain.

A man who bravely faces war's grim specter,
Yet falters when his honor's on the line,
Is but a shell, an empty vessel tossed,
Upon a sea of ever-changing tides.

I'd hoped, Cato, you'd stand for Rome's great cause,
But now I see, I stand with hope misplaced.

CATO

'Tis easy to wear virtue and principle as a cloak,
When naught is risked, nor consequence in sight.
For in Varro's shadow, I shall rise,
And claim the stations that befit my name.

While Fabius, your star now dimmed and waning,
Shall fade from memory, your time now past.
And so, with Varro's favor as my guide,
I'll carve my path and shape my legacy.

FABIUS

Reflect, dear Cato, on the path you choose,
For all creations bear their maker's mark.
If virtue's sacrificed for fleeting power,
Though noble be your dreams, corruption looms.
For principles forsaken leave a stain.

Take heed, my friend, and weigh the price you pay,
For in the end, what value holds a name,
When all that stands behind it turns to dust,
And righteousness is traded for a throne?

(FABIUS exits)

CATO

Alone I stand, with thoughts of Rome's bright fate,
A golden vision that doth spur me on.
My heart doth war with conscience, torn betwixt
The noble dream I hold and honor's call.

In twilight hours, I see a Rome of strength,
Of justice, peace, and boundless liberty,
And for that glorious end, I must persist,
Though all around me, shadows grow and loom.

What must I do, if not to bear the weight
Of compromise, for Rome's bright destiny?
In this dark hour, I steel my heart and mind,
And choose the path I deem shall lead us forth.

For in the end, when Rome doth proudly shine,
I'll know that all my struggles bore their fruit,
And though my soul may bear the scars of strife,
I'll stand, unbowed, a guardian of her light.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

SETTING: Paulus's Home.

AT RISE: SCIPIO is sulking on a couch,
slumped against the wall, looking
exhausted and demoralized.

(AEMILIA, 9 months pregnant,
enters)

AEMILIA

The streets still tremble 'neath the weight of strife,
With women, foreigners in danger's grip.
My father's name besmirched as I do mourn.

Yet hope remains, for Senate has declared
Marcus Junius Pera, dictator now,
And with his rise, perhaps, the storm shall cease.

Once Varro's title, consul, is removed,
His power to stoke the fires of discord quenched,
Our city may regain its peace and calm.

But now, the Senate gathers for their vote.
On Hannibal's terms, Rome's surrender looms,
This moment stands where all could be undone.
If not with courage met and wisdom used,
The heart of Rome may falter, then be lost.

SCIPIO

Perhaps our Rome does merit such a fall,
When he who caused the deaths of multitudes
Is hailed and celebrated in our streets.
Paulus, a hero, gone, while fools hold sway.

AEMILIA

My Scipio, I know your heart is heavy,
As is mine, for all our losses great.
Our fathers, your uncle, taken from this world,
(SCIPIO is shocked)
Their lives extinguished by the cruel hand of fate.

But trust, my love, that time shall come when we,
In solemn reverence, may mourn them true.

SCIPIO

My love, Aemilia, have I misheard,

For it appeared you spoke of death and loss,
 As if my father and my uncle fell.
 Yet, in Hispania, they still stand and fight.

AEMILIA

My dearest Scipio, 'tis a heavy truth,
 I did not err in speaking of their fate,
 Your father and your uncle, both are gone.

In separate battles fought in Hispania's lands,
 They met their end, and joined the realm of shades,
 Their earthly lives extinguished, lost to war.

The Senate sent word to my father, Paulus,
 And in my heart, I thought he had conveyed
 This grievous news to you, without delay.

I weep to be the bearer of such pain,
 And share the burden of this tragic tale,
 But now you know the truth, however dark,
 And we must face the world, bereft of them.

SCIPIO

Indeed, the night before his final breath,
 Paulus did visit me, and in his words,
 He urged forgiveness for my father's deeds.

In anger, I had spoken harshly to
 My sire, and now I find my heart, in pain,
 Regrets those bitter words, for love remained.

I longed to heed Paulus' wise advice,
 To offer pardon, and to mend the rift,
 Yet time has slipped away, and left me here.

I thought that there would be more time to heal,
 To reconcile our hearts, and speak the words
 Of love and understanding, father to son.

But now, their echoes fall upon the void,
 Unheard by him who's gone beyond this world,
 And I must bear this sorrow in my soul.

AEMILIA

My love, I share your grief, and hold you close,
 In this dark hour, our hearts entwined in pain.
 Yet time, relentless, spares us not a pause,
 To mourn our losses while Rome falls apart.

We must be strong, and stand against the tide,
That threatens to engulf our city dear,
And forge a path that leads to peace and order.

Though sorrow weighs upon us, we cannot
Let it consume us, lest we lose our way,
And fail to heed the call of duty's voice.

Take solace in our love, and let it be
A balm to heal the wounds that scar our hearts,
And know that we, together, shall prevail,
To honor those we've lost, and save our Rome.

SCIPIO

In Canusium, my love, I faced a test,
To halt eques from desertion's path.
A sword I held to one man's throat, yet now
I grapple with my own unyielding doubts.

The lofty words of yore now stripped away,
I see Rome's true face, a mob beguiled,
Ensnared within a demagogue's vile grasp.
A wretched sight, a Rome that's lost its soul.

Your father, and the many fallen at Cannae,
Did they not perish for a greater cause?
But now, it seems they died for one man's pride,
A country serving him, not all its kin.

Such Rome, I fear, is not a land worth saving,
A realm that leaves its noblest dreams behind.
And yet, I wrestle with this heavy choice,
To stand or fall, for Rome's uncertain fate.

AEMILIA

Scipio, place now your hand upon my swelling womb,
And feel the life within, our future child.
My love, I understand your troubled heart,
But Varro and the Lex Oppia prevail
Only when we, in weariness, concede.

To fight for Rome, her truest form and soul,
Is to defy the darkness creeping in.
Our strength lies not in blind obedience,
But in the courage to resist the wrong.

Since Rome's foundation, we have welcomed those
Who fled their homes, and sought our sheltering arms,
Their blood now mingled with our own, a bond
That ties our fates together, strong and true.

Yet, in my heart, I know the refugees'
Hard lives, and for our daughter, I desire
A brighter future, free from strife and pain.

Though Rome may stumble, she is not yet lost,
And we, who hold her highest ideals dear,
Must be the torchbearers in this dark night,
And strive to guide her back to righteousness.

Our child must know a home where they are safe,
And free to grow in love and hope unbound.
A place where truth and honor can prevail,
And where our child may flourish without fear.

SCIPIO

No matter what, my love, I vow to thee,
I'll guard our family with my very life.

AEMILIA

A noble sentiment, but know this truth:
Should Hannibal's vast force approach our door,
You cannot halt their march with love alone.
It is the strength of Rome's great army, then,
That stands between us and the shadows' grasp.

(calling)

Tullia!

(Enter TULLIA, a slave)

TULLIA

Yes, Domina.

(She helps AEMILIA to her feet)

SCIPIO

Whither art thou bound, so swollen?

AEMILIA

The Curia Hostilia.

SCIPIO

The Senate? Why?

AEMILIA

If you desire, you may stay and mourn,

But I shall march to Senate, plead our cause.
And if you wish to honor those we've lost,
Our fathers, uncle, friends now claimed by death,
Then stand with me, let's fight to save our Rome.

SCIPIO

Alas, why have the gods seen fit to curse
My heart to love a woman so resolved,
So headstrong? Yet her strength I must admire.

AEMILIA

Tullia, I beg thee, fetch my father's flag,
The standard from his first consulship,
With it, we shall remind the Senate true
Of who my father was, and what he stood.

TULLIA

Yes, Domina.

(AEMILIA and TULLIA exit. SCIPIO
sighs, looks at his sword; then
picks it up and follows them
out.)

(BLACKOUT)

(SCENE ENDS)

Scene 4

SETTING: Senate Main Chamber

AT RISE: PERA, the new dictator, is in front of the senate with the MAGISTER. FABIVS, CATO, and VARRO are among the senators. Senators are talking among themselves.

(Magister bangs his stick twice.)

SENATE MAGISTER

Senators, I beg you, settle down and hear
What urgent matters bring us to convene here.

It falls to us to weigh the cost of peace,
And what such terms would mean, and what release.
We must decide, with honor and with might,
To act for Rome, and for her future bright.

PERA

Esteemed senators, lend me your ears,
For in this hallowed chamber, we must weigh
The merits of the treaty laid before us.

Let us not rush to judgment, but instead,
Invite the voices, both of praise and scorn,
To make their case with reason, strong and clear.

In open discourse, let us seek the truth,
And with our wisdom, guide the course of Rome,
To forge a path that serves our people best.

So hear the arguments, both pro and con,
And let their words illuminate our minds,
That we may vote with conscience, unimpaired,
And make a choice that honors Rome's great name.

SENATE MAGISTER

Now Varro, come, your thoughts we wish to hear,
To speak on peace, step forth, make your case clear.

VARRO

It's a shame, I tell you! We won at Cannae,
Hannibal's defeat, his grand plans in disarray.
It's slander, and perhaps even worse, I say,

To claim otherwise, to twist the truth this way.

How can we let such lies take root and grow,
And dishonor those who fought and know?
If we don't stand for Rome, and for her right,
Who will, if not us, in this glorious fight?
To call this anything less than total victory,
Is to speak treason, and to distort history!

(Senators erupt in loud
disagreements)

SENATE MAGISTER

(Bangs his stick twice to call
for order)

Senators, order! Please, let us proceed.
The matter at hand is urgent, indeed.

VARRO

Esteemed Senators, I stand before you now,
To make a case for peace, and yet avow,
Hannibal's offer, generous and fair,
Is more surrender than we need to bear.

For after Cannae's battle, fought and won,
His terms, my friends, to us are like a sun,
That rises bright on Rome's horizon grand,
Not seeking death nor crushing our great land.

He asks but for what once was his domain,
Sicily, Sardinia, naught more to gain,
And Roman troops from Hispania part,
To leave their soil, but not to break our heart.

Let's weigh the cost of war against his terms,
To spare our land from conflict's endless storms,
For Hannibal seeks not Rome's utter fall,
But territories lost, a just recall.

Consider well, my fellow Romans, pray,
These terms of peace, and let us not delay,
To choose a path that spares our people's plight,
Accept his terms and end this dreadful fight.

Now Hannibal entreats us, Rome, to yield,
As they, who once opposed, bent to our will.
Let Sicily return to Carthaginian hands,
Withdraw our legions from Hispania's sands,

And bend our knee, acknowledge Carthage's sway.

SENATE MAGISTER

Esteemed colleagues, let your voices rise,
Who stands to speak against this offered deal?

(Fabius stands)

FABIUS

O noble Senate, hear my voice and mark,
To heed Varro now, would be absurd,
For he, the architect of Canae's doom,
Has led our Rome to suffer at his hands.

His lies, his cunning tricks on simple minds,
Have brought our once great city to its knees.
Shall we now trust the man whose deeds have scarred
The very heart and soul of all we hold dear?

Let wisdom guide us, not Varro's twisted words,
And seek a path that leads to Rome's resurgence,
Restoring her to glory and to strength,
Away from darkness, Varro's bitter mark.

(CATO stands)

CATO

Esteemed Senators, I rise in defense,
Of Varro, chosen by the people's hand.
For who among us, placed in his position,
Might not have erred as he did at Cannae?

He speaks, not with deceit, but from his heart,
The truth, as he perceives it, for our Rome.
We must remember that the voice of one,
Though stained by past mistake, still has its worth.

To silence him would be to disregard
The will of those who placed him in our midst,
Let us, in wisdom, weigh his words with care,
And seek the truth that serves our Rome the best.

(VARRO stands)

VARRO

O Senate, hear me, Varro, as I speak,
All eyes do blame and point, "Varro, Varro, Varro."
Yet, those who judge and wield their sharpened tongues,
Have failed to gaze upon their own misdeeds.

For years, the ones who led our Rome to now,

Have served themselves, neglecting Rome's great needs.
While worshipping at merit's gilded shrine,
They've closed the gates of chance to all but kin.

Would you bestow on winners high reward,
And doom the last to harsh and bitter ends?
Our Rome, it leaves behind its sons and daughters,
Yet you, the ones in power, turn deaf ears.

I stood for those who sought a better way,
Rejecting empty claims of lack of virtue.
And so they stand by me, despite your scorn,
For I, alone, did offer hope and answers.

(Enter AEMILIA and SCIPIO)

AEMILIA

Honored Magister, Dictator, Senators, I rise,
To share my thoughts.

VARRO

With all due respect, Aemilia, hear,
No woman holds the standing to address this Senate.

AEMILIA

Varro, hold your tongue, for I will not be silenced.

VARRO

Magister!

(SENATE MAGISTER looks to PERA)

PERA

Senators, pause, and let us not forget,
Aemilia bears the blood of our late consul,
The noble Paulus, who did bravely fall,
In service to our Rome on Cannae's field.

Her standing as his daughter grants her voice,
A chance to honor his great sacrifice,
And speak of what she carries in her heart,
In memory of all that we have lost.

So let her words be heard, and let us weigh
The wisdom they may offer in this hour,
As we consider what the fates demand,
For Rome's future and the course we choose.

AEMILIA

(faces the senators)

Most honorable Senators, I stand before you,
In humble state, a daughter, wife, and mother.
With heavy heart, I bear my father's banner,
Its letters proud, "SPQR" emblazoned,
A testament to strength and unity.

Nine months with child, my burden weighs me down,
Yet I entreat you, noble senators,
To heed my words, lest we succumb to darkness.
My father, valiant hero, fell at Cannae,
His blood a crimson tide upon the field.

My husband, too, a soldier brave and steadfast,
Lies wounded, bearing scars of war's cruel hand.
I stand before you, Senators, with purpose:
To urge you not to falter in this hour,
To face the might of Hannibal undaunted.

Surrender not, my countrymen, to despair,
For we are children of a mighty lineage,
The sons and daughters of proud Mars and Rhea.
Though Carthage's wrath may shake the earth beneath us,
We shall not yield our freedom or our honor.

Let not the specter of defeat betray us,
Nor voices whispering of doom subdue us.
For our Republic shall never falter.
Our hearts, our swords, united in one purpose:
To fight for liberty, for truth, for justice.

Let us remember those who've fallen, brave,
Their sacrifices etched in history's tome.
My father's banner, though it may be tattered,
Remains a symbol of our strength unyielding.
Let it inspire us now, as once it did.

And let the spirit of our mighty city
Infuse our hearts with courage, hope, and fire.
Though we may face great trials and tribulations,
We shall not waver, nor shall we surrender.

For I am Rome, and you are Rome, and we,
Together, shall defend our hallowed home.
So let us rise, united, unafraid,
And face the foe that dares to test our mettle.

Senators, hear my plea, and stand united,

Against the tempests of this war that rage.
Let courage be our flame, and honor fortress,
As we defy the odds and conquer fate!
For the Senate and People of Rome!
(Most Senators cheer)

(BLACKOUT)

(SCENE ENDS)

Scene 5

SETTING: Pualus's Home, Bedroom.

AT RISE: AEMILIA is resting bed. SCIPIO is cradling their new baby in his arms.

SCIPIO

In tender arms, I hold this precious life,
My newborn daughter, gift of Juno's grace.
Of all the sights beheld by mortal eyes,
None can compare to her little face.

Within her gaze, a world of wonder lies,
A promise of the future, hope's embrace.
My heart doth swell with love, unbounded, pure,
For in her eyes, I see our noble gens.

Oh, fairest child, thou art my joy, my treasure,
A beacon shining bright in life's vast sea.
No measure can contain the love I bear thee,
Thou, dearest one, the sweetest gift to me.
(Kisses baby)

AEMILIA

My dearest Scipio, our hearts now swell,
For we, as two, have grown into a trinity.
Our daughter's face, like Juno's tender grace,
Illuminates our lives with love's affinity.
(SLAVE enters)

SLAVE

Dominus, Marcus Junius Pera, Dictator of Rome.
(SLAVE exits, PERA enters)

SCIPIO

Welcome, dictator.

PERA

Scipio, Aemilia, I sought the Senate's hall,
Yet paused upon my way to see you fair.
For I did love so your impassioned speech,
Which quelled the ceaseless drone of Varro's tongue.

Your words did echo in that hallowed space,
Your message clear and strong.

There shall be no peace with Carthage. Not yet.

AEMILIA

I'm heartened by your words, good Pera, kind,
And grateful for the faith you place in me.

To build anew our army's mighty force,
A task of weight and purpose lies ahead.
Yet in your hands, I trust our Rome shall rise,
Resilient, strong, with courage in its stead.

PERA

(Marvels at the baby)

Ah! Behold the miracle of life, so new,
This tender babe, a girl of wondrous grace,
I stand in awe, and offer my delight.

If not for recent birth, dear Aemilia,
I would entreat you, Tribune's role to take.
Yet rest you must, and tend to life anew,
Your strength and health to keep.

Since you, at present, cannot join our ranks,
Mayhaps your Scipio could fill the void,
And take the place you would have occupied.

SCIPIO

I thank thee, Pera, for this honor bestowed,
Yet I must humbly, with regret, decline.
For in my years, I've seen the face of war,
At Ticinus, Trasimene, and Cannae's field.
Forgive me, Pera, for I must refuse,
And seek a life beyond the battleground.

PERA

I understand your heart, brave Scipio,
And know the toll that war hath wrought on thee.
You've earned a rest, and with your loved ones stay,
Yet soon, I fear, our Rome may call again.

But now, I leave you to your newfound peace,
While I, with haste, attend the Senate's need.

For ships we seek to save our men besieged,
In Tarraco's grasp, surrounded, desperate.
I go to plead our cause and gather aid,
To bring them safely home from war's dark maw.

SCIPIO

Do you intend to leave Hispania's shores?

PERA

Our hands are tied, our options limited.
 For even if I wished to hold our ground,
 No soul steps forth to take command in Hispania.
 A suicide mission, many do perceive,
 And thus, we find ourselves in dire straits.

My hope, to muster ships and bring them home,
 To save our men to fight another place, another day.
 We are stretched too thin, our forces strained.
 No troops can we afford to leave fair Italy,
 Save those who venture forth to Sicily's land.

Aemilia, once more, my thanks to you,
 For words that roused our hearts, our spirits lifted.
 Your father, noble Paulus, would be proud,
 To see his daughter stand so strong and true.

Now I must bid farewell, dear friends, to you,
 Scipio and Aemilia, united, blessed.
 May peace and love attend your days ahead,
 And may we meet again in brighter times.

(PERA exits)

AEMILIA

My love, are you at peace with what you hear?
 That we may leave Hispania to its fate,
 Or, if we can, evacuate our men,
 And let our allies face their doom alone?

SCIPIO

I must confess, my love,
 This bitter news doth rouse a storm within.
 My heart, enraged at this forsaking choice,
 Yet powerless am I to change its course.
 Unable to alter what the Senate wills.

AEMILIA

My Scipio, you know deep within your heart,
 This claim of powerlessness rings not true.
 I've seen your anger with your father, fierce,
 For selfish choices that did keep him far.

His final act, which risked fair Rome herself,
 A bitter memory in your soul remains.

You yearn to be a different man, I know,
To stay with us, and break the chains he forged.

Yet, in this choice, you echo his own path,
Pursuing what you want, not what Rome needs.
Think, my love, of those who fought at Cannae,
Whom you, alone, led out from death's embrace.

When all seemed lost, you rose with strength and courage,
And those who lived chose you to guide their way.
In you, they saw a leader, fierce and true,
Your bravery, your will to fight when lost,
These are the qualities our Rome needs.

SCIPIO

I shall not be as my father, my love.
I will not leave in time of your need.

AEMILIA

Scipio, 'tis not leaving that you do.
In truth, you go to shield and to protect,
Our child and me, in ways we need the most,
Your valor serves to keep us safe and sound.

In every battle fought, your presence near,
A guardian for the ones you hold most dear,
And home we wait, our love for you, unbound.

SCIPIO

(Gives her the baby)

My Aemilia, your words ring true and clear,
And now I see my father's choices made,
A better understanding dawns on me,
Though still I grapple with the weight they bear.

If I must choose a life to emulate,
A death to mirror as my final act,
It is Paulus, brave and selfless in his stand,
Whose path I long to follow, true and just.

In courage, honor, and devotion bound,
I shall embrace the duty laid on me,
And strive to be the man that Rome requires,
For you, for them, and for our legacy.

(SCIPIO kisses AEMILIA and
exits)

(BLACKOUT)

(SCENE ENDS)

Scene 6

SETTING: Senate

AT RISE: PERA and the MAGISTER sit facing the senators, which includes VARRO, FABIVS, and CATO. The senators are arguing amongst each other)

SENATE MAGISTER

(Bangs stick twice)

Hear now, my call, let order fill this space,
The Senate Magister commands your grace.

(Talking stops)

PERA

Noble senators, I stand before you now,
To speak of matters pressing, grave, and dire.

In Hispania's sun-kissed, distant lands,
Our valiant soldiers, true to Rome, they stand.
Yet, we can spare no more to aid their plight,
Our legions needed on more urgent fronts.

'Tis not with eager voice I bring this news,
But duty calls, and so I must be true.
The shores of Tarraco call for swift relief,
Their cries for help echo through these halls.

If we send not our troops to bolster them,
Then let us find a course to save our kin.
I urge thee, Senate, let us send our ships,
To evacuate the men who've bled for Rome.

Let not their sacrifice be spent in vain,
Nor leave them stranded, prey to hostile hands.
The winds may guide our ships to safety's shores,
And bring our brothers back to Rome's embrace.

In this dark hour, let wisdom light our path,
And guide us to the course of action just.
We must preserve the strength of Rome, our home,
And find the means to save our kin abroad.

Your counsel wise, your judgment keen, I seek,

As we navigate these troubled, stormy seas.
 Take heed, my fellow Romans, take your stand,
 And let us choose the path that's best for all.

FABIUS

Esteemed senators, do not forget,
 The reason we embarked on this crusade.
 The Carthaginians, led by Hannibal,
 Did violate our pact, attacked our friends.

In Saguntum's proud and ancient walls,
 They sought to break our bond and test our might.
 And so we sent our soldiers, valiant men,
 To stand against the foe and right this wrong.

Hispania serves as Hannibal's stronghold,
 The base from which he wields his might and power.
 If we should falter, if we should withdraw,
 Then Carthage would regain a foothold strong.

Think not only of the forces there,
 But also of the foe's insidious grasp.
 Each resource they muster, every man,
 Is bent on keeping Hispania theirs.

We must not waver in our staunch resolve,
 For if we do, the enemy shall thrive.
 By standing firm, we starve the Carthaginian hold,
 And weaken Hannibal's ambitious grasp.

I urge you, senators, remember well,
 The cause that brought us to this very fight.
 For Rome, for honor, for our people's sake,
 We must stand fast, and see this struggle through.

Let not the shifting winds of war deter,
 Our noble course, our just and righteous path.
 We fight for more than land, for more than power,
 We fight for Rome, and all she represents.

(Senators clamor in agreement.

SCIPIO enters, stands in back)

PERA

My fellow senators, I pose this question,
 To you who've gathered in this sacred hall:
 Who amongst you will take the mantle now,
 To be the proconsul of Hispania?

The challenge daunting, yet the cause is just,
 To lead our forces in that distant land.
 To face the Carthaginians with resolve,
 And hold the line against their fierce advance.

Our people's fate, our very future lies,
 Within the hands of him who takes this charge.
 The path is fraught with peril, and with strife,
 Yet, victory awaits the steadfast heart.

So I beseech, which one of you shall rise,
 To take the reins and lead our legions forth?
 To stand for Rome, for honor, and for truth,
 And face the enemy on their own ground?

(Waits)

Step forth, ye noble sons of Rome, be brave,
 Embrace the calling, answer destiny.
 Your name shall echo through the halls of time,
 As one who dared to fight for Rome and win.

(Waits)

The choice is yours, the moment ripe for change,
 As history awaits your bold decision.
 Who shall it be, who'll bear the weight and pride,
 Of Rome's great legacy in Hispania?

SCIPIO

I will go. (more forcefully) I will go!

I volunteer to lead our troops in Hispania's fields.
 No more shall I endure the bitter sting,
 Of seeing comrades slandered, cast aside.

As one who faced the carnage at Cannae,
 And stood amongst the remnants of our host,
 I've borne the weight of shame, though undeserved,
 And seen my brothers branded with disgrace.

No more shall I allow this taint to spread,
 No more shall I let Rome's brave soldiers fall,
 Into the void of infamy and scorn.

VARRO

Your little speech cannot conceal the truth,
 These men from Cannae bear a shameful mark.

Cowards they are, and bent on dark designs,

To cast their failures on my blameless name.
 Their weakness, not my leadership, the cause,
 Of their retreat, their flight in face of death.

SCIPIO

Enough, Varro, your words hold little weight.
 These soldiers fought for Rome, not for your name.

They sought not honor, nor to bring you low,
 But for their brothers, and their homeland dear.
 Their hearts were true, their aims, to win and live,
 Unmoved by your vain image, your false pride.

Even had they triumphed at Cannae's field,
 Your virtue would remain as it stands now:
 A hollow husk, an empty, barren shell.
 And had it been brave Paulus in command,

Who led them to disaster, he would face
 The consequences, share their fate with grace.
 Unlike you, Varro, who shirked your part,
 And left the blame to fall on others' heads.

No bad units dwell within our ranks,
 But bad leaders, who lack virtue, yes.
 Your failings cast a shadow on your name,
 While Paulus stands in light, his honor clear.

I strive to emulate that noble man,
 To lead with virtue, strength, and dignity.
 To honor those who've fallen in our cause,
 And bring to Rome the glory she deserves.

FABIUS

Young Scipio, your zeal is plain to see,
 But certain laws and customs we must heed.

In public office, you have yet to serve,
 And thus the requisite experience,
 To hold the title of proconsul, lack.
 Our ways demand a tested, steady hand.

Moreover, your age falls short, I fear,
 Of that which Rome requires for such a post.
 Though noble be your spirit and intent,
 The years must pass before this role is yours.

I speak not to demean your aspirations,
 But to uphold the order we hold dear.
 Our system's strength is rooted in these laws,
 And bending them would weaken Rome's resolve.

PERA

If our Republic is to stand and thrive,
 We must adapt, be flexible and bold.

These times of strife demand we reassess,
 The rigid structures that have bound us long.
 As Dictator, I possess the power,
 To waive the age and experience required.

CATO

I must object, Pera, with all due care,
 And though I recognize young Scipio's skill.

His talents in the field, I've witnessed true,
 And hold him in esteem for courage shown.
 Yet sending him, so young and unprepared,
 Into the fray would be akin to loss.

SCIPIO

Esteemed senators, though young I stand,
 My age belies the battles I have faced,
 And in the ranks of Rome, experience earned.

In many a fray, I've seen the Carthaginian might,
 Their strengths and weaknesses, laid bare to me,
 The lessons Hannibal has taught, I've learned.

He showed the value of intelligence,
 The crucial role of knowing well the land,
 And how to wield terrain to one's advantage.

I know our legions' power, their boundless force,
 When led by those who understand their worth,
 For when inspired, they rival gods themselves.

So let not youth deceive your seasoned eyes,
 For wisdom, too, can dwell in hearts still young,
 And Rome requires the best of all her sons.

With courage, skill, and knowledge, I shall strive,
 To guide our forces to triumphant ends,
 And see our Rome restored, in strength and glory.

CATO

Conceding even your points, Scipio,
Without the needed reinforcements sent,
To stand beside our men at Tarraco's gates,
We risk their fate, abandon them to doom.

Though flexibility has merit, yes,
We must not let our judgment be impaired,
By desperation in this trying hour.
The stakes are high, the cost of failure great.

I urge you, reconsider this decree,
And weigh the risks that such a choice entails.
(PERA looks pensive, stroking
his chin)

SCIPIO

Then grant me reinforcements,
And let me take whomever you can spare.

FABIUS

None there are.

SCIPIO

I'll welcome freedmen, foreigners alike,
Who, though they stand outside our common ranks,
Would pledge their lives to Rome and fight for her.
In unity, we find our greatest strength.

And let the slaves, who yearn for freedom's taste,
Join our legions and earn their liberty.
Through service, they may claim a brighter fate,
And stand as brothers in our common cause.

VARRO

(scoffs)

Foreigners? Freedmen? Slaves? Is this your scheme,
To make an army from such motley crew?

Young Scipio, your folly is laid bare,
Your true intent to grasp at fleeting glory.
Would Rome be better served by such a force,
A patchwork quilt of weak and disparate threads?

SCIPIO

Varro, behold Hannibal's diverse host,
Comprised of men from nations far and wide,
Their tongues as varied as the lands they've roamed.

Yet still, they fight as one, a seamless force,
United 'neath a leader's guiding hand,
And bound by common purpose, fierce and true.

It strikes me as most odd, that even now,
After your own calamitous defeat,
You fail to grasp the import of true leaders.

For leadership is more than rank and name,
It is the skill to mold a disparate mass,
Into a force that conquers fear and doubt.

VARRO

(angry)

Your reckless plan exposes youthful pride,
And self-serving ambition, thinly veiled!

Your father, Cornelius, sought to mend
His sullied reputation with great feats,
Yet met his end, a victim of his dreams.
Young Scipio, I see in you the same,
A desperate thirst to chase Hispania's fame.

And now you stand, no doubt with lesser skill,
Inheriting the flaws that marked his path,
And hasten toward the fate that he embraced.

Just like your sire and uncle, you will fall,
In distant lands, a casualty of pride,
Another of your clan consumed by folly.

So heed my words, and let them guide you well,
Lest you become a tragic tale retold,
A legacy of loss, ambition's end,
And let Rome suffer for the errors made.

SCIPIO

When I return from Hispania's fields,
Triumphant, with the spoils of victory,
I'll stand before you, proud and unashamed.

And then, when Rome's esteemed patricians seek,
To teach their children of the perils great,
Of pride, of hubris, and deceitful lies,

They'll not recount the tale of Scipio's kin,

But rather speak your name, Gaius Varro,
And how you fled from fate at Cannae's plain.

Your cowardice, the very emblem of
The dangers that befall a wayward heart,
A caution to the sons and daughters of Rome.

So let my deeds and victories resound,
And prove the strength and worth of Scipio's line,
While history remembers you in shame.

VARRO

I'll not endure the slander of a youth,
A snot-nosed stripling, spewing base untruths,
Who dares to stand before me, so impertinent.

What right have you to judge my worth and deeds,
When you, a fledgling, still have much to learn,
About the trials and tribulations faced?

Your words, like poisoned darts, may pierce the air,
Yet they shall find no purchase in my heart,
For I know well the man that I have been.

(VARRO storms out, exits)

CATO

No matter the debate or plans proposed,
We stand upon the ground of sacred law.

Scipio, your offer, though sincere and bold,
Transgresses boundaries our forebears set.
The law is firm, its purpose clear and just,
To guide our state through tumult and through peace.

By bending rules to fit our current plight,
We risk the very core of Rome's foundation.
The path we tread must not defy the codes,
That shape our governance and keep us strong.

We must respect the law, for in its stead,
Lies chaos, disarray, and swift decline.
Let us not act in haste, nor desperation,
But seek solutions rooted in our ways.

SCIPIO

Our founders, wise and visionary, knew
That they could not predict what lay ahead.

They granted the dictator power to bend,
To waive those laws, in times of direst need.
For laws are crafted not by gods, but men,
And the Republic stands, adaptive, strong.

We are not bound by unyielding dogma,
But by a framework, flexible and firm,
That grants us means to keep and grow our freedom,
To face the trials that each new dawn may bring.

I urge you, Pera, use your granted power,
And grant me what I need to face our foe.
(PRA raises his hand, stopping
debate on the matter)

PERA

What you ask for, Scipio, you shall have.

SCIPIO

Most noble Dictator, Senate, I extend
My gratitude for this great trust bestowed.

PERA

Scipio, our Rome's salvation now in hand,
Make haste, for time is scarce and foes abound.

Go, Proconsul Scipio, with fortune's favor,
And may Mars himself look kindly on your quest.

SCIPIO

With humbled heart and steadfast will, I go.
(SCIPIO exits)

FABIUS

Humbled? That, I very much doubt.
My noble peers, I beg you, heed my words,
For caution whispers low in this dark hour.
In Scipio's eyes, ambition's flame does burn,
And tempers not with humble grace, I fear.

Though he may stand as Rome's potential savior,
A serpent's slumber may lurk in his breast.
Let us not forget the vanity of Varro,
Whose thirst for power did put our state at risk.

I entreat you, Senators, be wise,
And weigh each step with measured watchfulness.
For while we strive to mend our Rome's deep wounds,

The seeds of tyranny may sprout anew.

PERA

(smiles)

A wise man's words do echo in my thoughts,
For deep within each man, a tyrant hides.
And yet, the seeds of tyranny take root
Not by ambition's hand alone, I deem.

Were it so, our republic of three great centuries,
Would ne'er have withstood such ravenous lust.
Ambition drives us forth, but ruthlessness,
And cunning's art, and guile, do play their part.

Yet shamelessness is chief among these traits,
To sever bonds of friendship, love, and trust,
Leaving but cowards and fanatics near,
While Rome herself does bleed for one man's pride.

In Scipio's gaze, I find no trace of this,
For shame has led him to our hallowed halls,
And in his eyes, a fire burns for family and Rome,
To serve her people, not to rule their hearts.

(BLACKOUT)

(SCENE ENDS)

Scene 7

SETTING: Cannae

AT RISE: AEMILIA stands at an alter with offerings of incense, flowers, and money.

AEMILIA

Here fell my father, and with him, the souls
Of countless men who fought at Cannae's field.
Their bodies broken, yet their spirits soar,
In testament to Rome's unyielding strength.

Each man, a shining paragon of virtue,
Their sacrifice now etched in history.
To my dear father, I impart this praise:
A man of honor, wisdom, love, and grace.

These fallen warriors, though their lives are lost,
Still echo in the hearts of those they loved.
For Rome, the bastion of liberty,
A Republic standing 'gainst the tide.

This city, born from struggle and from strife,
Carves out a future, free from tyranny.
Our sons and daughters shall rise,
Inheriting the rights our fathers claimed.

And in our darkest hour, when hope is frail,
When shadows loom and threaten to consume,
We must remember, never to relent,
Against injustice, bigotry, and hate.

We stand together, Romans young and old,
Against demagogues' lies and tyrants' grasp.
Our fight persists, for freedom never yields,
And in each of us, a burning flame endures.

So raise your voices, let them echo forth,
Our rallying cry, resounding through the land:
We shall not falter, we shall not despair,
For Rome, united, shall forever stand!

(CURTAIN)