Eric

A Dramatic Romance
Characters

ERIC
SWEGN
GUNTHAR
HARDICNUT
RAGNAR
HARALD

ASLAUG
HERTHA
Act I

Eric’s Palace at Yara.

Scene 1

ERIC
Eric of Norway, first whom these cold fiords,
Deep havens of disunion, from their jagged
And fissured crevices at last obey,
The monarch of a thousand Vikings! Yes,
But how long shall that monarchy endure
Which only on the swiftness of a sword
Has taken its restless seat? Strength’s iron hound
Pitilessly bright behind his panting prey
Can guard for life’s short splendour what it won.
But when the sword is broken or when death
Proves swifter? All this realm with labour built
Dissolving like a transitory cloud
Becomes the thing it was, cleft, parcelled out
By discord. I have found the way to join,
The warrior’s sword, builder of unity,
But where’s the way to solder? where? O Thor
And Odin, masters of the northern world,
Wisdom and force I have; some strength is hidden
I have not; I would find it out. Help me,
Whatever power thou art who mov’st the world,
To Eric unrevealed. Some sign I ask.

ASLAUG (singing, outside)

Love is the hoop of the gods
Hearts to combine.
Iron is broken, the sword
Sleeps in the grave of its lord.
    Love is divine.
Love is the hoop of the gods
    Hearts to combine.

ERIC
Is that your answer? Freya, mother of heaven,
Thou wast forgotten. The heart! the seat is there.
For unity is sweet substance of the heart
And not a chain that binds, not iron, gold,
Nor any helpless thought the reason knows.
How shall I seize it? where? give me a net
By which the fugitive can be snared. It is
Too unsubstantial for my iron mind.

ASLAUG (singing, outside)
When Love desires Love,
    Then Love is born.
Nor golden gifts compel,
Nor even beauty's spell
    Escapes his scorn.
When Love desires Love,
    Then Love is born.

ERIC (calling)
Who sings outside? Harald! who sings outside?

HARALD (entering)
Two dancing-girls from Gothberg. Shall they come?

ERIC
Admit them. Harald goes out.

From light lips and casual thoughts
The gods speak best as if by chance, nor knows
The speaker that he is an instrument
But thinks his mind the mover of his words.

_Harald returns with Aslaug and Hertha._

HARALD
King Eric, these are they who sang.

ERIC
Women,
Who are you? or what god directed you?

ASLAUG
The god who rules all men, Necessity.

ERIC
It was thou who sangst!

ASLAUG
My lips at least were used.

ERIC
Thou sayest. Dost thou know by whom?

ASLAUG
By Fate.

For she alone is prompter on our stage,
And all things move by an established doom,
Not freely. Eric’s sword and Aslaug’s song,
Music and thunder are the rhythmic chords
Of one majestic harp. With equal mind
She breaks the tops that she has built; her thrones
Are ruins. She treads her way foreseen; our steps
Are hers, our wills are blinded by her gaze.

ERIC
I think the soul is master. Who art thou?
HERTHA
Expelled from Gothberg with displeasure fierce,
Norwegians by the wrathful Swede constrained,
To Norway we return.

ERIC
Why went you forth?

HERTHA
From a bleak country rich by spoil alone
Of kinder populations, far too cold,
Too rough to love the sweetness of a song,
The rhythm of a dance, with need for spur,
We fled to an entire and cultured race,
Whose hearts come apt and liberal from the gods
Are steel to steel, but flowers to a flower.

ERIC
And wherefore war they upon women now?

ASLAUG
By thy aggressions moved.

ERIC
A nobler choice
Of vengeance I will give them, though more hard.
(to Gunthar who enters)
Gunthar, thou comest from the front. What news?

GUNTHAR
Swegn, earl of Trondhjem, lifts his outlawed head.
By desperate churls and broken nobles joined
He moves towards the Swede.

ERIC
Let Sigurd’s force
Cut off from Sweden and his lair the rude
Revolted lord. He only now resists,
Champion of discord, remnant like our seas,
The partisan and pattern of the past.
They waste their surge of strength in sterile foam,
Hungry for movement, careless what they break,
Splendid, disastrous, active for no fruit.
Such men are better with the gods than here
To trouble earth. Taken, let him not live.

ASLAUG
Taken! Our words are only an arrogant breath,
Who all are here, the doomer and the doomed,
As captives of a greater doom than ours,
To live or die.

HERTHA
Be silent.

ASLAUG
I silence my heart
Which has remembered what all men forget,
That Olaf of the seas was Norway’s head
And Swegn his son.

ERIC
Will you remain with me?
Though from my act there flowed on you distress,
Make me be fountain of your better days;
Your loss shall turn a fall to splendid gains.

HERTHA
Thy royal bounty shall atone for much.

ASLAUG (low, to herself)
Nobler atonement’s needed.
ERIC

It is yours.
Harald, make room for them within my house.
Gunthar, we will converse some other hour.

(alone)
Love! If it were this girl with antelope eyes
And the high head so proudly lifted up
Upon a neck as white as any swan’s!
But how to sway men’s hearts rugged and hard
As Norway’s mountains, as her glaciers cold,
The houses of their violent desires,
Whose guests are interest and power and pride?
Perhaps this stag-eyed woman comes for that,
To teach me.
Scene 2

_Hertha, Aslaug._

**ASLAUG**

Hertha, we dance before the man tonight. Why not tonight?

**HERTHA**

Because I will not act
Lifting in vain a rash frustrated hand. When all is certain, I will strike.

**ASLAUG**

To near,
To strike while all posterity applauds!
For Norway’s poets to the end of time
Shall sing in phrases noble as the theme
Of Aslaug’s dance and Aslaug’s dagger.

**HERTHA**

Yes,
If we succeed, but who will sing the praise
Of foiled assassins? Shall we risk defeat?
While we sleep flung in a dishonoured tomb,
And Swegn of Norway roams until the end
The desperate snows and forest silences
Hopeless, proscribed, alone?

**ASLAUG**

No more defeat!
Too often, too deeply have we drunk that cup!
HERTHA
The man we come to slay,—

ASLAUG
A mighty man!
He has the face and figure of a god,
A marble emperor with brilliant eyes.
How came the usurper by a face like that?

HERTHA
His father was a son of Odin’s stock.

ASLAUG
His fable since he rose! A pauper house
Of one poor vessel and a narrow fiord
And some bare pine-trees possessor,—this was he,
The root he sprang from.

HERTHA
But from this to tower
In three swift summers undisputed lord
Of Norway, before years had put their growth
Upon his chin! If not of Odin’s race,
Odin is for him. Are you not afraid,
You who see Fate even in a sparrow’s flight,
When Odin is for him?

ASLAUG
Aslaug is against.
He has a strength, an iron strength, and Thor
 Strikes hammerlike in his uplifted sword.
But Fate alone decides when all is said,
Not Thor, nor Odin. I will try my fate.

HERTHA
He is a pure usurper, is he not?
Norway’s election made him king, men say.
ASLAUG
Left Olaf Sigualdson no heirs behind?
Was his chair vacant?

HERTHA
Of Trondhjem; but they cried,
The inland and the north were free to choose.

ASLAUG
As rebels are.

HERTHA
Discord was seated there.
To the South rejoicing in her golden gains,
Crying, “I am Norway”, all the rude-lipped North
Blew bronze refusal and its free stark head
To breathe cold heaven was lifted like its hills.
We sought the arbitration of the sword,
That sharp blind last appeal. The sword has judged
Against our claim.

ASLAUG
The dagger overrides.

HERTHA
When it is keen and swift enough! O yet,
If kindly peace even now were possible!
The suzerainty? it is his. We fought for it,
We have lost it. Let it rest where it has fallen.

ASLAUG
Better our barren empire of the snows!
Better with reindeer herding to survive,
Or else a free and miserable death
Together!
HERTHA
It is well to be resolved.
Therefore I flung the doubt before your mind,
To strike more surely. Aslaug, did you see
The eyes of Eric on you?

ASLAUG (indifferently)
I am fair.
Men look upon me.

HERTHA
You see nothing more?

ASLAUG (disdainfully)
What is it to me how he looks? He is
My human obstacle and that is all.

HERTHA
No, Aslaug, there’s much more. Alone with you,
Absorbed,—you see it,—suddenly you strike
And strike again, swift great exultant blows.

ASLAUG
It is too base!

HERTHA
Un lulled, he could not perish.
Have you not seen his large and wakeful gaze?
This is our chance. Must not Swegn mount his throne?

ASLAUG
So that I have not to degrade myself,
Arrange it as you will. You own a swift,
Contriving, careful brain I cannot match.
To dare, to act was always Aslaug’s part.
HERTHA
You will not shrink?

ASLAUG
I sprang not from the earth
To bound my actions by the common rule.
I claim my kin with those whom Heaven’s gaze
Moulded supreme, Swegn’s sister, Olaf’s child,
Aslaug of Norway.

HERTHA
Then it must be done.

ASLAUG
Hertha, I will not know the plots you weave:
But when I see your signal, I will strike.

HERTHA (alone)
Pride violent! loftiness intolerable!
The grandiose kingdom-breaking blow is hers,
The baseness, the deception are for me.
It was this, the assumption, the magnificence,
Made Swegn her tool. To me his lover, counsellor,
Wife, worshipper, his ears were coldly deaf.
But, lioness of Norway, thy loud bruit
And leap gigantic are ensnared at last
In my compelling toils. She must be trapped!
She is the fuel for my husband’s soul
To burn itself on a disastrous pyre.
Remove its cause, the flame will sink to rest, —
And we in Trondhjem shall live peacefully
Till Eric dies, as some day die he must,
In battle or by a revolting sword,
And leaves the spacious world unoccupied.
Then other men may feel the sun once more.
Always she talks of Fate: does she not see,
This man was born beneath exultant stars,
Had gods to rock his cradle? He must possess
His date, his strong and unresisted time
When Fate herself runs on his feet. Then comes,—
All things too great end soon,—death, overthrow,
The slow revenges of the jealous gods.
Submitting we shall save ourselves alive
For a late summer when cold spring is past.
Scene 3

Eric, Aslaug.

ERIC
Come hither.

ASLAUG
Thou hast sent for me?

ERIC
Come hither. What art thou?

ASLAUG
What thou knowest.

ERIC
Do I know?

ASLAUG (to herself)
Does he suspect? (aloud) I am a dancing-girl. My name is Aslaug. That thou knowest.

ERIC
Where
Did Odin forge thy sweet imperious eyes, Thy noble stature and thy lofty look? Thou dancest, — yes, thou hast that motion; song, The natural expression of thy soul, Comes from thy lips, floats, hovers and returns Like a wild bird which wings around its nest. This art the princesses of Sweden use,
And those Norwegian girls who frame themselves
On Sweden.

**ASLAUG**
It may be, my birth and past
Were nobler than my present fortunes are.

**ERIC**
Why cam’st thou to me?

**ASLAUG (to herself)**
Does Death admonish him
Of danger? does he feel the impending stroke?
Hertha could turn the question.

**ERIC**
Why soughtst thou out
Eric of Norway? Wherefore broughtst thou here
This beauty as compelling as thy song
No man can gaze on and possess his soul?

**ASLAUG**
I am a dancing-girl; my song, my face
Are my best stock. I carried them for gain
Here to the richest market.

**ERIC**
Hast thou so?
I buy them for a price. Aslaug, thy body too.

**ASLAUG**
Release me! Wilt thou lay thy hands on death?
(_wrenching herself free_)
All Norway has not sold itself thy slave.

**ERIC**
This was not spoken like a dancing-girl!
ASLAUG (to herself)
What is this siege? I have no dagger with me.
Will he discover me? will he compel?

ERIC
Though Norway has not sold itself my slave,
Thou hast. Remember what thou art, or else
Thou feignst to be.

ASLAUG (to herself)
I am caught in his snare.
He is subtle, terrible. I see the thing
He drives at and admire unwillingly
The marble tyrant.

ERIC
Better play thy part
Or leave it.
If thou wert fashioned nobler than thou feignst,
Confess that mightier name and lay thyself
Between my hands. But if a dancing-girl,
I have bought thee for a hire, thy face, thy song,
Thy body. I turn not, girl, from any way
I can possess thee, more than the sea hesitates
To engulf what it embraces.

ASLAUG
Thou speakest words
I scorn to answer.

ERIC
Or to understand?
Thou art an enemy who in disguise
Invad’st my house to spy upon my fate.

ASLAUG
What if I were?
ERIC
Thou hast too lightly then
Devised thy chains and close imprisonment,
Too thoughtlessly adventured a divine
And glorious stake, this body, heaven’s hold,
This face, the earth’s desire.

ASLAUG
What canst thou do?
I do not think I am afraid of death.

ERIC
Far be death from thee who, if heaven were just,
Wouldst walk immortal! Thou seest no nearer peril?

ASLAUG
None that I tremble at or wish to flee.

ERIC
Let this shake thee that thou art by thy choice
Caged with the danger of the lion’s mood,
Helpless hast seen the hunger of his eyes
And feelst on thee the breath of his desire.

ASLAUG (alarmed)
I came not here to spy.

ERIC
Why cam’st thou then?

ASLAUG
To sing, to dance, to earn.

ERIC
Richly then earn.
Thou hast a brain, and knowest why I looked
On thee, why I have kept thee in my house.
My house! what fate has brought thy steps within?  
Thou, thou hast found the way to my desire!  
Thinkst thou thy feet have entered to escape  
As lightly as a wild bee from a flower,  
The lair and antre of thy enemy?  
Disguise? Canst thou disguise thy splendid soul?  
Then if thy face and speech more nobly express  
The truth of thee than this vocation can,  
Reveal it and deserve my clemency.

\textit{ASLAUG (violently)}  
Thy clemency!  
\textit{(restraining herself)}  
I am a dancing-girl;  
I came to earn.

\textit{ERIC}  
Thou art obstinate in pride!  
Choose yet.

\textit{ASLAUG}  
I have not any choice to make.

\textit{ERIC}  
Wilt thou still struggle vainly in the net?  
Because thou hast the lioness in thy mood,  
Thou thoughtst to play with Eric! It is I  
Who play with thee; thou liest in my grasp,  
As surely as if I held thee on my knees.  
I am enamoured of thy golden hair,  
Thy body like the snow, thy antelope eyes,  
This neck that seems to know it carries heaven  
Upon it easily. Thy song, thy speech,  
This gracious rhythmic motion of thy limbs  
Walking or dancing, all the careless pride  
That undulates in every gesture and tone,  
Have seized upon me smiling to possess.
But I have only learned from Fate and strength
To seize by force, master, enjoy, compel,
As I will thee. Enemy and prisoner,
Or dancing-girl and purchased chattel, choose!
Thou wilt not speak? thou findest no reply?

**ASLAUG**
Because I am troubled by thy violent words.
I cannot answer thee, or will not yet.

*(turning away)*
How could he see this death? Is he a god
And knows men’s hearts? This is a terrible
And iron pressure!

**ERIC**
What was thy design?
To spy? to slay? For thou art capable
Even of such daring.

**ASLAUG (to herself)**
Swiftly, swiftly done
It might be still! To put him off an hour,
Some minutes,—O, to strike!

**ERIC**
What hast thou chosen?

**ASLAUG (turning to him)**
King, mend thy words and end this comedy.
I have laughed till now and dallied with thy thoughts,
A little amazed. Unfearing I stand here,
Who come with open heart to seek a king,
Pure of all hostile purpose, innocent
Of all the guileful thoughts and blood-stained plans
Thou burdenest thy fierce suspicions with.
This is the Nemesis of men who rise
Too suddenly by fraud or violence
That they suspect all hearts, yes, every word
Of sheltering some direr violence,
Some subtler fraud, and they expect their fall
Sudden and savage as their rise has been.

ERIC
Thou art my dancing-girl and nothing more?
Assume this chain, this necklace, for thy life.
Nor think it even thy price.

She dashes the necklace to the ground.

Thou art not subtle!

ASLAUG (agitated)
It is not so that women’s hearts are wooed.

ERIC
Yet so I woo thee, so do all men woo
Enamoured of what thou hast claimed to be.
Art thou the dancing-girl of Norway still
Or some disguised high-reaching nobler soul?

ASLAUG (suddenly)
I am thy dancing-girl, King Eric. Look,
I lift thy necklace.

ERIC
Take it, yet be free.
Thou canst not slip out from my hands by this.
No feigned decision will I let thee make,
But one which binds us both. I give thee time,
In hope thy saner mind will yet prevail,
Not courage most perverse, though ardent, rule.
Only one way thou hast to save thyself:
Reveal thy treason, Aslaug, trust thy king.

Aslaug, alone, lifts the chain, admires
it and throws it on a chair.
ASLAUG
You are too much like drops of royal blood.

She lifts it again.

A necklace? No, my chain! Or wilt thou prove
A god’s death-warrant?

She puts it round her neck.

Hertha, Hertha, here!
(to Hertha, as she enters)
O counsellor, art thou come?

HERTHA
I heard thee call.

ASLAUG
I called. Why did I call? See, Hertha, see
How richly Norway’s Eric buys his doom!

HERTHA
He gave thee this? It is a kingdom’s price.

ASLAUG
A kingdom’s price! the kingdom of the slain!
A price to rid the nations of a god.
O Hertha, what has earth to do with gods,
Who suffers only human weight? Will she
Not go too swiftly downward from her base
If Eric treads her long?

HERTHA
Sister of Swegn,
There are new lustres in thy face and eyes.
What said he to thee?

ASLAUG
What did Eric say,
Eric to Aslaug, sister of King Swegn?
A kingdom’s price! Swegn’s kingdom! And for him,
My marble emperor, my god who loves,
This mortal Odin? What for him? By force
Shall he return to his effulgent throne?

HERTHA
You were not used to a divided mind.

ASLAUG
Nor am I altered now, nor heart-perplexed.
But these are thoughts which naturally arise.

HERTHA
He loves you then?

ASLAUG
He loves and he suspects.

HERTHA
What, Aslaug?

ASLAUG
What we are and we intend.

HERTHA
If he suspects!

ASLAUG
It cannot matter much,
If we are rapid.

HERTHA
If we spoil it all!
I will not torture Swegn with useless tears
Perishing vainly. I will slay and die.
He shall remember that he wears his crown
By our great sacrifice and soothe his grief
With the strong magnificent circle, or else bear it
A noble duty to the nobly dead.

(\textit{after a moment's reflection})

Child, you must humour him, you must consent.

\textsc{Aslaug}

To what?

\textsc{Hertha}

To all.

\textsc{Aslaug}

Hast thou at all perused

The infamy which thou advisest?

\textsc{Hertha}

Yes.

I do not bid you yield, but seem to yield.

Even I who am Swegn’s wife, would do as much.

But though you talk, you still are less in love,

Valuing an empty outward purity

Before your brother’s life, your brother’s crown.

\textsc{Aslaug}

You know the way to bend me to your will!

\textsc{Hertha}

Give freedom, but no licence to his love,

For when he thinks to embrace, we shall have struck.

\textsc{Aslaug}

And, Hertha, if a swift and violent heart

Betrayed my will and overturned your plans?

Is there no danger, Hertha, there?

\textsc{Hertha}

\textit{Till now}

I feared not that from Aslaug, sister of Swegn.
But if you fear it!

ASLAUG

No, since I consent.
You shall not blame again my selfishness,
Nor my defect of love.

HERTHA (alone)

Swegn then might rule!

(with a laugh)

I had almost forgotten Fate between
Smiling, alert, and his too partial gods.
Scene 4

ERIC
They say the anarchy of love disturbs
Gods even: shaken are the marble natures,
The deathless hearts are melted to the pang
And rapture. I would be, O Odin, still
Monarch of my calm royalty within,
My thoughts my subjects. Do I hear her come?
(to Aslaug who enters)
Thou com’st? thou art resolved? thou hast made thy choice?

ASLAUG
I choose, if there is anything to choose,
The truth.

ERIC
Who art thou?

ASLAUG       Aslaug, who am now
A dancing-woman.

ERIC       And afterwards? Hast thou then
Understood nothing?

ASLAUG     What should I understand?

ERIC
What I shall do with thee. This earthly heaven
In which thou liv'st shall not be thine at all.
It was not fashioned for thy joy but mine
And only made for my immense desire.
This hast thou understood?

ASLAUG (pale and troubled)
Thou triest me still.

ERIC
I saw thee shake.

ASLAUG
It is not easily
A woman’s heart sinks prostrate in such absolute
Surrender.

ERIC
Thy heart? Is it thy heart that yields?
O thou unparalleled enchanting frame
For housing of a strong immortal guest,
If man could seize the heart as palpably,
The form, the limbs, the substance of this soul!
That, that we ask for; all else can be seized
So vainly! Walled from ours are other hearts:
For if life’s barriers twixt our souls were broken,
Men would be free and one, earth paradise
And the gods live neglected.

ASLAUG
This heart of mine?
Purchase it richly, for it is for sale.

ERIC
Yes, speak.

ASLAUG
With love; I meant no more.
ERIC
Thou namest lightly a tremendous word.
If thou hadst known this mightiest thing on earth
And named it, should it not have upon thy lips
So moving an impulsion for a man
That he would barter worlds to hear it once?
Words are but ghosts unless they speak the heart.

ASLAUG
I have yielded.

ERIC
Then tonight. Thou shak’st?

ASLAUG
There is
A trouble in my blood. I do not shake.

ERIC
Thou heardsd me?

ASLAUG
Not tonight. Thou art too swift,
Too sudden.

ERIC
Thou hast had leisure to consult
Thy comrade smaller, subtler than thyself?
Better hadst thou chosen candour and thy frank soul
Consulted, not a guile by others breathed.

ASLAUG
What guile, who give all for an equal price?
Thou giv’st thy blood of rubies; I my life.
ERIC
Thou hast not chosen then to understand.

ASLAUG
Because I sell myself, yet keep my pride?

ERIC
Thou shalt keep nothing that I choose to take.
I see a tyranny I will delight in
And force a oneness; I will violently
Compel the goddess that thou art. But I know
What soul is lodged within thee, thou as yet
Ignorest mine. I still hold in my strength,
Though it hungers like a lion for the leap,
And give thee time once more; misuse it not.
Beware, provoke not the fierce god too much;
Have dread of his flame round thee.

ASLAUG (alone)
Odin and Freya, you have snares! But see,
I have not thrown the dagger from my heart,
But clutch it still. How strange that look and tone,
That things of a corporeal potency
Not only travel coursing through the nerves
But seem to touch the seated soul within!
It was a moment’s wave, for it has passed
And the high purpose in my soul lives on
Unconquerably intending to fulfil.
Act II

A room in Eric’s house.

Scene 1

_Hertha, Aslaug._

**HERTHA**
See what a keen and fatal glint it has,
Aslaug.

**ASLAUG**
Hast thou been haunted by a look,
O Hertha, has a touch bewildered thee,
Compelling memory?

**HERTHA**
Then the gods too work?

**ASLAUG**
A marble statue gloriously designed
Without that breath our cunning maker gives,
One feels it pain to break. This statue breathes!
Out of these eyes there looks an intellect
That claims us all; this marble holds a heart,
The heart holds love. To break it all, to lay
This glory of God’s making in the dust!
Why do these thoughts besiege me? Have I then —
No, it is nothing; it is pity works,
It is an admiration physical.
O he is far too great, too beautiful
For a dagger’s penetration. It would turn,
The point would turn; it would deny itself
To such a murder.

**HERTHA**
Aslaug, it is love.

**ASLAUG** *angrily*
What saidst thou?

**HERTHA**
When he lays a lingering hand
Upon thy tresses,—Aslaug, for he loves,—
Canst thou then strike?

**ASLAUG**
What shakes me? Have I learned
To pity, to tremble? That were new indeed
In Olaf’s race. Give me self-knowledge, Gods.
What are these unaccustomed moods you send
Into my bosom? They are foreign here.

*Eric enters and regards them. Hertha, seeing him, rises to depart.*

**ERIC**
Thou art the other dancing-woman come
From Sweden to King Eric!

**HERTHA**
He has eyes
That look into the soul. What mean his words?
But they are common. Let me leave you, Aslaug.

*She goes out.*

**ASLAUG**
I would have freedom here from thy pursuit.
ERIC
Why shouldst thou anywhere be free from me?
I am full of wrath against thee and myself.
Come near me.

ASLAUG (to herself)
It is too strange — I am afraid!
Of what? Of what? Am I not Aslaug still?

ERIC
Art thou a sorceress or conspirator?
But thou art both to seize my throne and heart,
And I will deal with thee, thou dreadful charm,
As with my enemy.

ASLAUG
Let him never touch!

ERIC
I give thee grace no longer; bear thy doom.

ASLAUG
My doom is in my hands, not thine.

ERIC (with a sudden fierceness)
Thou errst,
And thou hast always erred. Dar’st thou imagine
That I who have enveloped in three years
All Norway more rebellious than its storms,
Can be resisted by a woman’s strength,
However fierce, however swift and bold?

ASLAUG
I have seen thy strength. I cherish mine unseen.

ERIC
And I thy weakness. Something yet thou fearst.
ASLAUG
Nothing at all.

ERIC
Yes! though thy eyes defy me,
Thy colour changes and thy limbs betray thee.
All is not lionlike and masculine there
Within.

He advances towards her.

ASLAUG
Touch me not!

ERIC
It is that thou fearst?
Why dost thou fear it? Is it thine own heart
Thou tremblest at? Aslaug, is it thy heart?

He takes her suddenly into his arms
and kisses her. Aslaug remains like
one stricken and bewildered.

Lift up thine eyes; let me behold thy strength!

ASLAUG
O gods! I love! O loose me!

ERIC
Thou art taken.
Whatever was thy purpose, thou art mine,
Aslaug, thou sweet and violent soul surprised,
Intended for me when the stars were planned!
Sweetly, O Aslaug, to thy doom consent,
The doom to love, the death of hatred. Draw
No useless curtaining of shamed refusal
Betwixt our yearnings, passionately take
The leap of love across the abyss of hate.
Force not thy soul to anger. Leave veils and falterings
For meaner hearts. Between us let there be
A noble daylight.

**Aslaug**
Let me think awhile!
Thy arms, thy lips prevent me.

**Eric**
Think not! Only feel,
Love only!

**Aslaug**
O Eric, king, usurper, conqueror!
O robber of men’s hearts and kingdoms! O
Thou only monarch!

**Eric**
Art thou won at last,
O woman who disturbst the musing stars
With passion? Soul of Aslaug, art thou mine?

**Aslaug**
Thine, Eric? Eric! Whose am I, by whom am held?
(sinking on a seat)
I cannot think. I have lost myself! My heart
Desires eternity in an embrace.

**Eric**
Wilt thou deny me anything I claim
Ever, O Aslaug? Art thou mine indeed?

**Aslaug**
What have I done? What have I spoken? I love!
(after a silence, feeling in her bosom)
But what was there concealed within my breast?

**Eric** (observing her action)
I take not a divided realm, a crown
That's shared. Thou hadst a purpose in thy heart
I know not, but divine. Thou lov'st at length;
But I have knowledge of the human heart,
What opposite passions wrestle there with gusts
And treacherous surprises. I trust not then
Too sudden a change, but if thou canst be calm,
Yet passionately submit, I will embrace thee
For ever. Think and speak. Art thou all mine?

ASLAUG
I know no longer if I am my own.
The world swims round me and heaven's points are changed.
A purpose! I had one. I had besides
A brother! Had! What have I now? You Gods,
How have you rushed upon me! Leave me, King.
It is not good to trust a sudden heart.
The blood being quiet, we will speak again
Like souls that meet in heaven, without disguise.

ERIC
I do not leave thee, for thou art ominous
Of an abysm uncrossed.

ASLAUG
Yet that were best.
For there has been too much between us once
And now too little. Leave me, King, awhile
To wrestle with myself and calmly know
In this strange strife the gods have brought me to,
Which thing of these in me must live and which
Be dumb for ever.

ERIC
Something yet resists.
I will not leave thee till I know it and tame,
For, Aslaug, thou wast won.
ASLAUG  King, thou art wise
In war and counsel, not in women’s hearts.
Thou hast surprised a secret that my soul
Kept tremulously from my own knowledge. Yet,
If thou art really wise, thou wilt avoid
To touch with a too rude and sudden hand
The direr god who made my spirit fear
To own its weakness.

ERIC  Art thou wise thyself?
I take thee not for counsellor.

ASLAUG  Yet beware.
There was a gulf between my will and heart
Which is not bridged yet.

ERIC  Break thy will, unless
Thou wouldst have me break it for thee.
The older Aslaug rises now against the new.

ASLAUG  It rises, rises. Let it rise. Leave me
My freedom.

ERIC  Aslaug, no, for free thou roamst
A lioness midst thy passions.

ASLAUG (with a gesture)  Do then, O King,
Whatever Fate commands.
ERIC
I am master of my Fate.

ASLAUG
Too little, who are not masters of ourselves!

ERIC
Art thou that dancing-woman, Aslaug, yet?

ASLAUG
I am the dancing-girl who sought thee, yet, Eric.

ERIC
It may be still the swiftest way.
Let then my dancing-woman dance for me
Tonight in my chambers. I will see the thing
Her dancing means and tear its mystery out.

ASLAUG
If thou demandest it, then Fate demands.

ERIC
Thy god grows sombre and he menaces,
It seems! For afterwards I can demand
Whatever soul and body can desire
Twixt man and woman?

ASLAUG
If thy Fate permits.
Thy love, it seems, communes not with respect.

ERIC
The word exists not between thee and me.
It is burned up in too immense a fire.
Wilt thou persist even after thou hast lain
Upon my bosom? Thou claimest my respect?
Yet art a dancing-woman, so thou sayst?  
Aslau, let not the darker gods prevail.  
Put off thy pride and take up truth and love.

ASLAUG (sombre)  
I am a dancing-woman, nothing more.

ERIC  
The hate love struck down rises in thy heart.  
But I will have it out, by violence,  
Unmercifully.

He strides upon her, and she half  
cowers from him, half defies.

(taking her violently into his arms)  
Thus blotted into me  
Thou shalt survive the end of Time. Tonight!

He goes out.

ASLAUG  
How did it come? What was it leaped on me  
And overpowered? O torn distracted heart,  
Wilt thou not pause a moment and give leave  
To the more godlike brain to do its work?  
Can the world change within a moment? Can  
Hate suddenly be love? Love is not here.  
I have the dagger still within my heart.  
O he is terrible and fair and swift!  
He is not mortal. Yet be silent, yet  
Give the brain leave. O marble brilliant face!  
O thou art Odin, thou art Thor on earth!  
What is there in a kiss, the touch of lips,  
That it can change creation? There’s a wine  
That turns men mad; have I not drunk of it?  
To be his slave, know nothing but his will!  
Aslau, and Eric! Aslau, sister of Swegn,  
Who makes his bed on the inclement snow  
And with the reindeer herds, that was a king.
Act II, Scene 1

Who takes his place? Eric and Aslaug rule.
Eric who doomed him to the death, if seized,
Aslaug, the tyrant, the usurper's wife,
Who by her brother's murder is secured
In her possession. Wife! The concubine,
The slave of Eric, — that his pride intends.
What was it seized on me, O heavenly powers?
I have given myself, my brother's throne and life,
My pride, ambition, hope, and grasp, and keep
Shame only. Tonight! What happens then tonight?
I dance before him, — royal Olaf's child
Becomes the upstart Eric's dancing-girl!
What happens else tonight? One preys upon
Aslaug of Norway! O, I thank thee, Heaven,
That thou restorest me to sanity.
It was his fraudulent and furious siege,
And something in me proved a traitor. Fraud?
O beauty of the godlike brilliant eyes!
O face expressing heaven's supremacy!
No, I will put it down, I put it down.
Help me, you gods, help me against my heart.
I will strike suddenly, I will not wait.
'Tis a deceit, his majesty and might,
His dreadful beauty, his resistless brain.
It will be very difficult to strike!
But I will strike. Swegn strikes, and Norway strikes,
My honour strikes, the Gods, and all his life
Offends each moment.

(to Hertha, who enters)
Hertha, I strike tonight.

HERTHA
Why, what has happened?

ASLAUG
That thou shalt not know.

I strike tonight.

She goes out.
HERTHA

It is not difficult
To know what drives her. I must act at once,
Or this may have too suddenly a tragic close.
Not blood, but peace, not death, you Gods, but life,
But tranquil sweetness!
Scene 2

Eric, Hertha.

ERIC
I sent for thee to know thy name and birth.

HERTHA
My name is Hertha and my birth too mean
To utter before Norway's lord.

ERIC
Yet speak.

HERTHA
A Trondhjem peasant and a serving-girl
Were parents to me.

ERIC
And from such a stock
Thy beauty and thy wit and grace were born?

HERTHA
The Gods prodigiously sometimes reverse
The common rule of Nature and compel
Matter with soul. How else should it be guessed
That Gods exist at all?

ERIC
Who nurtured thee?

HERTHA
A dancing-girl of Gothberg by a lord
Of Norway entertained, to whom a child
I was delivered. Song and dance were hers;
I made them mine.

ERIC

Their names? the thrall? the lord?

HERTHA

Olaf of Norway, earl of Trondhjem then,
And Thiordis whom he loved.

ERIC

Thou knowest Swegn,
The rebel?

HERTHA

Yes, I know.

ERIC

And lov’st perhaps?

HERTHA

Myself much better.

ERIC

Yes? He is a man
Treacherous and rude and ruthless, is he not?

HERTHA (with a movement)

I would not speak of kings and mighty earls:
These things exceed my station.

ERIC

Ah, thou lov’st!
Thou wilt not blame.
HERTHA     Thou art mistaken, King.
He cannot conquer and he will not yield,
But weakens Norway. This in him I blame.

ERIC    Thou hast seen that? Thy peasant father got
A wondrous politician for his child!
Do I abash thee?

HERTHA    I am what the Gods
Have made me. But I understand at last;
Thou thinkst me other than I seem.

ERIC        Some thought
Like that I had.

HERTHA    King Eric, wilt thou hear?

ERIC    I much desire it, if I hear the truth.

HERTHA    Betray me not to Aslaug then.

ERIC        That’s just.
She shall not know.

HERTHA     What if I came, O King,
For other purpose, not to sing and dance,
And yet thy friend, the well-wisher, at least,
Of Norway and her peace?
ERIC

Speak plainly now.

HERTHA
If I can show thee how to conquer Swegn
Without one stroke of battle, wilt thou grant
My bitter need?

ERIC
I would give much.

HERTHA
Wilt thou?

ERIC
If so I conquer him and thy desire
Is something I can grant without a hurt
To Norway or myself.

HERTHA
It is.

ERIC
Speak then,
Demand.

HERTHA
I have not finished yet. Meantime
If I avert a danger from thy head
Now threatening it, do I not earn rewards
More ample?

ERIC
More? On like conditions, then.

HERTHA
If I yield up great enemies to thy hands
Thou knowst not of, wilt thou reject my price,  
Confusing different debts in one account?

ERIC
Hast thou yet more to ask? Thou art too shrewd  
A bargainer.

HERTHA
Giving Norway needed peace,  
Thyself friends, safety, empire, is my claim  
Excessive then?

ERIC
I grant thee three demands.

HERTHA
They are all. He asks not more who has enough.  
Thrice shall I ask and thrice shall Eric give  
And never have an enemy again  
In Norway.

ERIC
Speak.

HERTHA
Thy enemies are here,  
No dancing-girls, but Hertha, wife of Swegn,  
And Aslaug, child of Olaf Sigualdson,  
His sister.

ERIC
It is well.

HERTHA
The danger lies  
In Aslaug’s hand and dagger which she means  
To strike into thy heart. Tonight she strikes.
ERIC
And Swegn?

HERTHA
Send me to him with perilous word
Of Aslaug in thy hands; so with her life
Buy his surrender, afterwards his love
With kingly generosity and trust.

ERIC
Freely and frankly hast thou spoken, Queen
Who wast in Trondhjem: now as freely ask.

HERTHA
The life of Swegn; his liberty as well,
Submitting.

ERIC
They are thine.

HERTHA
And Aslaug’s life
And pardon, not her liberty.

ERIC
They are given.

HERTHA
And, last, forgiveness for myself, O King,
My treason and my plots.

ERIC
This too I grant.

HERTHA
I have nothing left to ask for.
Act II, Scene 2

ERIC
Thou hast done?
Let me consign thee to thy prison then.

HERTHA
My prison! Wilt thou send me not to Swegn?

ERIC
I will not. Why, thou subtle, dangerous head,
Restored to liberty, what perilous schemes
Might leap into thy thoughts! Shall I give Swegn,
That fierce and splendid fighter, such a brain
Of cunning to complete and guide his sword?
What if he did not yield, rejected peace?
Wilt thou not tell him Aslaug’s life is safe?
To prison!

HERTHA
Thou hast promised, King.

ERIC
I keep
My promise to thee, Hertha, wife of Swegn.
For Swegn thou askest life and liberty,
For Aslaug life and pardon, for thyself
Forgiveness only. I can be cunning too.
Hertha, thou art my prisoner and thrall.

HERTHA (after a pause, smiling)
I see. I am content. Thou showest thyself
Norway’s chief brain as her victorious sword.
Free or a prisoner, let me do homage
To Eric, my King and Swegn’s.

ERIC
Thou art content?
HERTHA
This face and noble bearing cannot lie.
I am content and feel as safe with thee
As in my husband’s keeping.

ERIC (smiling) So thou art,
Thou subtle voice, thou close and daring brain.
I would I felt myself as safe with thee.

HERTHA
King Eric, think me not thy enemy.
What thou desirest, I desire yet more.

ERIC
Keep to that well; let Aslaug not suspect.
My way I'll take with her and thee and Swegn.
Fear nothing, Hertha; go.

Hertha goes out.

O Freya Queen,
Thou helpst me even as Thor and Odin did.
I make my Norway one.
Act III

Eric’s Chamber.

Scene 1

Eric, Harald.

ERIC
At dawn have all things ready for my march.
Let none be near tonight. Send here to me
Aslaug the dancing-girl.

I have resumed
The empire and the knowledge of myself.
For this strong angel Love, this violent
And glorious guest, let it possess my heart
Without a rival, not invade the brain,
Not with imperious discord cleave my soul
Jangling its ordered harmonies, nor turn
The manifold music of humanity
Into a single and a maddening note.
Strength in the spirit, wisdom in the mind,
Love in the heart complete the trinity
Of glorious manhood. There was the wide flaw,—
The coldness of the radiance that I was.
This was the vacant space I could not fill.
It left my soul the torso of a god,
A great design unfinished, and my works
Mighty but crude like things admired that pass
Bare of the immortality which keeps
The ages. O, the word they spoke was true!
'Tis Love, 'tis Love fills up the gulfs of Time!  
By Love we find our kinship with the stars,  
The spacious uses of the sky. God's image  
Lives nobly perfect in the soul he made,  
When Love completes the godhead in a man.

Thou com'st to me! I give thee grace no more.  
What hast thou in thy bosom?

**ASLAUG**

Only a heart.

**ERIC**

A noble heart, though wayward. Give it me,  
Aslaug, to be the secret of the dawns,  
The heart of sweetness housed in Aslaug's breast  
Delivered from revolt and ruled by love.

**ASLAUG**

Why hast thou sent for me and forced to come?  
Wilt thou have pity on me even yet  
And on thyself?

**ERIC**

I am a warrior, one  
Who have known not mercy. Wilt thou teach it me?  
I have learned, Aslaug, from my soul and Life  
The great wise pitiless calmness of the gods,  
Found for my strength the proud swift blows they deal  
At all resistance to their absolute walk,  
Thor's hammer-stroke upon the unshaped world.  
Its will is beaten on a dreadful forge,  
Its roads are hewn by violence divine.  
Is there a greater and a sweeter way?  
Knowst thou it? Wilt thou lead me there? Thy step  
Swift and exultant, canst thou tread its flowers?
ASLAUG
I know not who inspires thy speech; it probes.

ERIC
My mind tonight is full of Norway’s needs. 
Aslaug, she takes thy image.

ASLAUG
Mine! O if
Tonight I were not Norway!

ERIC
Thou knowest Swegn?

ASLAUG
I knew and I remember.

ERIC
Yes, Swegn, — a soul
Brilliant and furious, violent and great,
A storm, a wind-swept ocean, not a man.
That would seize Norway? that will make it one?
But Odin gave the work to me. I came
Into this mortal frame for Odin’s work.

ASLAUG
So deify ambition and desire.

ERIC
If one could snap this mortal body, then
Swegn even might rule, — not govern himself, yet govern
All Norway! Aslaug, canst thou rule thyself?
’Tis difficult for great and passionate hearts.

ASLAUG
Then Swegn must die that Eric still may rule!
Was there no other way the gods could find?
ERIC
A deadly duel are the feuds of kings.

ASLAUG
They are so.

She feels for her dagger.

ERIC
Aslaug, thou feelest for thy heart?
Unruled it follows violent impulses
This way, that way, working calamity
Dreams that it helps the world. What shall I do,
Aslaug, with an unruly noble heart?
Shall I not load it with the chains of love
And rob it of its treasured pain and wrath
And bind it to its own supreme desire?
Richly 'twould beat beneath an absolute rule
And sweetly liberated from itself
By a golden bondage.

ASLAUG
And what of other impulses it holds?
Shall they not once rebel?

ERIC
They shall keep still;
They shall not cry nor question; they shall trust.

ASLAUG
It cannot be that he reads all my heart!
The gods play with me in his speech.

ERIC
Thou knowest
Why thou art called?
ASLAUG

I know why I am here.

ERIC

Few know that, Aslaug, why they have come here, 
For that is heaven’s secret. Sit down beside me 
Nearer my heart. No hesitating! come. 
I do not seize thy hands.

ASLAUG

They yet are free. 
Is it the gods who bid me to strike soon? 
My heart reels down into a flaming gulf. 
If thou wouldst rule with love, must thou not spare 
Thy enemies?

ERIC

When they have yielded. Is thy choice made? 
Whatever defence thou hast against me yet 
Use quickly, before I seize these restless hands 
And thy more restless heart that flees from bliss. 

Aslaug rises trembling.

ASLAUG

Desiredst thou me not to dance tonight, 
O King, before thee? 

ERIC

It was my will. Is it thine 
Now? Dance, while yet thy limbs are thine.

ASLAUG

I dance 
The dance of Thiordis with the dagger, taught 
To Hertha in Trondhjem and by her to me.
ERIC (smiling)
Aslaug, my dancing-girl, thou and thy dance
Have daring, but too little subtlety.

ASLAUG (moving to a distance)
What use to struggle longer in the net?
Vain agony! he watches and he knows!
I'll strike him suddenly. It cannot be
The senses will so overtake the will
As to forbid its godlike motion. If
I feared not my wild heart, I could lean down
And lull suspicion with a fatal gift.
My blood would cleanse what shame was in the touch.
So would one act who knew her tranquil will
But none thus in the burning heart sunk down.

ERIC
Wilt thou play vainly with that fatal toy?
Dance now.

ASLAUG
My limbs refuse.

ERIC
They have no right.

ASLAUG
O Gods, I did not know myself till now,
Thrown in this furnace. Odin’s irony
Shaped me from Olaf’s seed! I am in love
With chains and servitude and my heart desires
Fluttering like a wild bird within its cage
A tyrant’s harshness.

ERIC
Wilt thou dance? or wait
Till the enamoured motion of thy limbs
Remember joy of me? So would I have
Thy perfect motion grow a dream of love.
Tomorrow at the dawning will I march
To violent battle and the sword of Swegn
Bring back to be thy plaything, a support
Appropriate to thy action in the dance.
Aslaug, it shall replace thy dagger.

**Aslaug**

Fate
Still drives me with his speech and Eric calls
My weakness on to slaughter Eric. Yes,
But he suspects, he knows! Yet will I strike,
Yet will I tread down my rebellious heart,
And then I too can die and end remorse.

**Eric**

Where is thy chain
I gave thee, Aslaug? I would watch it rise,
Rubies of passion on a bosom of snow,
And climb for ever on thy breast aheave
With the sea’s rhythm as thou dancest. Dance
Weaving my life a measure with thy feet
And of thy dancing I will weave the stroke
That conquers Swegn.

**Aslaug**

The necklace? I will bring it.
Rubies of passion! Blood-drops still of death!

*She goes out.*

**Eric**

The power to strike has gone out of her arm
And only in her stubborn thought survives.
She thinks that she will strike. Let it be tried!

*He lies back and feigns to sleep. Aslaug returns.*
ASLAUG
Now I could slay him. But he will open his eyes
Appalling with the beauty of his gaze.
He did not know of peril! All he has said
Was only at a venture thought and spoken,—
Or spoken by Fate? Sleeps he his latest sleep?
Might I not touch him only once in love
And no one know of it but death and I,
Whom I must slay like one who hates? Not hate,
O Eric, but the hard necessity
The gods have sent upon our lives,—two flames
That meet to quench each other. Once, Eric! then
The cruel rest. Why did I touch him? I am faint!
My strength ebbs from me. O thou glorious god,
Why wast thou Swegn’s and Aslaug’s enemy?
We might so utterly have loved. But death
Now intervenes and claims thee at my hands—
And this alone he leaves to me, to slay thee
And die with thee, our only wedlock. Death!
Whose death? Eric’s or Swegn’s? For one I kill.
Dreadful necessity of choice! His breath
Comes quietly and with a happy rhythm,
His eyes are closed like Odin’s in heaven’s sleep.
I must strike blindly out or not at all
Screening out with my lashes love,—as now—or now!
For Time is like a sapper mining still
The little resolution that I keep.
Swegn’s death or life upon that little stands.
Swegn’s death or life and such an easy stroke,
Yet so impossible to lift my hand!
To wait? To watch more moments these closed lids,
This quiet face and try to dream that all
Is different! But the moments are Fate’s thoughts
Watching me. While I pause, my brother’s slain,
Myself am doomed his concubine and slave.
I must not think of him! Close, mind, close, eyes.
Free the unthinking hand to its harsh work.
Eric of Norway, live and do thy will
With Aslaug, sister of Swegn and Olaf’s child,
Aslaug of Trondhjem. For her thought is now
A harlot and her heart a concubine,
Her hand her brother’s murderess.

ERIC                  Thou hast broken
At last.

ASLAUG
Ah, I am broken by my weak
And evil nature. Spare me not, O King,
One vileness, one humiliation known
To tyranny. Be not unjustly merciful!
For I deserve and I consent to all.

ERIC
Aslaug!

ASLAUG
No, I deny my name and parentage.
I am not she who lived in Trondhjem: she
Would not have failed, but slain even though she loved.
Let no voice call me Aslaug any more.

ERIC
Sister of Swegn, thou knowest that I love.
Daughter of Olaf, shouldst thou not aspire
To sit by me on Norway’s throne?

ASLAUG                Desist!
Thou shalt not utterly pollute the seat
Where Olaf sat. If I had struck and slain,
I would deserve a more than regal chair.
But not on such must Norway's diadem rest,
A weakling with a hand as impotent
And faltering as her heart, a sensual slave
Whose passionate body overcomes her high
Intention. Rather do thy tyrant will.
King, if thou spare me, I will slay thee yet.

ERIC
Recoil not from thy heart, but strongly see
And let its choice be absolute over thy soul.
Its way once taken thou shalt find thy heart
Rapid; for absolute and extreme in all,
In yielding as in slaying thou must be,
Sweet violent spirit whom thy gods surprise.
Submit thyself without ashamed reserve.

ASLAUG
What more canst thou demand than I have given?
I am prone to thee, prostrate, yielded.

ERIC
Throw from thee
The bitterness of thy self-abasement. Find
That thou hast only joy in being mine.
Thou tremblest?

ASLAUG
Yes, with shame and grief and love.
Thou art my Fate and I am in thy grasp.

ERIC
And shall it spare thee?

ASLAUG
Spare Swegn. I am in thy hands.
Eric
Is't a condition? I am lord of thee
And lord of Swegn to slay him or to spare.

Aslaug
No, an entreaty. I am fallen here,
My head is at thy feet, my life is in thy hands:
The luxury of fall is in my heart.

Eric
Rise up then, Aslaug, and obey thy lord.

Aslaug
What is thy will with me?

Eric
This, Aslaug, first.
Take up thy dagger, Aslaug, dance thy dance
Of Thiordis with the dagger. See thou near me;
For I shall sit, nor shouldst thou strike, defend.
What thy passion chose, let thy freed heart confirm;
My life and kingdom twice are in thy hands
And I will keep them only as thy gift.

Aslaug
So are they thine already; but I obey.

Eric
Swegn’s life I hold. Thou gavest it to me
With the dagger.

Aslaug
It is thine to save.
Eric  Norway
Thou hast given, casting it for ever away
From Olaf’s line.

ASLAUG
What thou hast taken, I give.

ERIC
And last thyself without one covering left
Against my passionate, strong, devouring love.
Thou seest I leave thee nothing.

ASLAUG
I am thine.
Do what thou wilt with me.

ERIC
Because thou hast no help?

ASLAUG
I have no help. My gods have brought me here
And given me into thy dreadful hands.

ERIC
Thou art content at last that they have breathed
Thy plot into thy mind to snare thy soul
In its own violence, bring to me a slave,
A bright-limbed prisoner and thee to thy lord?
See Odin’s sign to thee.

ASLAUG
I know it now.
I recognise with prostrate heart my fate
And I will quietly put on my chains
Nor ever strive nor wish to break them more.
ERIC
Yield up to me the burden of thy fate
And treasure of thy limbs and priceless life.
I will be careful of the golden trust.
It was unsafe with thee. And now submit
Gladly at last. Surrender body and soul,
O Aslaug, to thy lover and thy lord.

ASLAUG
Compel me, they cannot resist thy will.

ERIC
I will have thy heart’s heart’s surrender, not
Its body only. Give me up thy heart.
Open its secret chambers, yield their keys.

ASLAUG
O Eric, is not my heart already thine,
My body thine, my soul into thy grasp
Delivered? I rejoice that God has played
The grand comedian with my tragedy
And trapped me in the snare of thy delight.

ERIC
Aslaug, the world’s sole woman! thou cam’st here
To save for us our hidden hope of joy
Parted by old confusion. Some day surely
The world too shall be saved from death by love.
Thou hast saved Swegn, helped Norway. Aslaug, see,
Freya within her niche commands this room
And incense burns to her. Not Thor for thee,
But Freya.

ASLAUG
Thou for me! not other gods.
ERIC
Aslaug, thou hast a ring upon thy hand.
Before Freya give it me and wear instead
This ancient circle of Norwegian rites.
The thing this means shall bind thee to our joy,
Beloved, while the upbuilted worlds endure.
Then if thy spirit wander from its home,
Freya shall find her thrall and lead her back
A million years from now.

ASLAUG
A million lives!
Scene 2

ASLAUG
The world has changed for me within one night.
O surely, surely all shall yet go well,
Since Love is crowned.

ERIC (entering)
Aslaug, the hour arrives
When I must leave thee. For the dawn looks pale
Into our chamber and these first rare sounds
Expect the arising sun, the daylight world.

ASLAUG
Eric, thou goest hence to war with Swegn,
My brother?

ERIC
What knows thy heart?

ASLAUG
That Swegn shall live.

ERIC
Thou knowst his safety from deliberate swords.
None shall dare touch the head that Aslaug loves.
But if some evil chance came edged with doom,
Which Odin and my will shall not allow,
Thou wouldst not hold me guilty of his death,
Aslaug?

ASLAUG
Fate orders all and Fate I now
Have recognised as the world’s mystic Will
That loves and labours.

ERIC

Because it knows and loves,
Our hearts, our wills are counted, are indulged.
Aslaug, for a few days in love and trust
Anchor thy mind. I shall bring back thy joy.
For now I go with mercy and from love.

He embraces her and goes.

ASLAUG

Swegn lives. A Mind, not iron gods with laws
Deaf and inevitable, overrules.
Act IV

Swegn’s fastness in the hills.

Scene 1

Swegn, Hardicnut, with soldiers.

SWEGN
Fight on, fight always, till the Gods are tired. In all this dwindling remnant of the past Desires one man to rest from virtue, cease From desperate freedom?

HARDICNUT
No man wavers here.

SWEGN
Let him depart unhurt who so desires.

HARDICNUT
Why should he go and whither? To Eric’s sword That never pardoned? If our hearts were vile, Unworthily impatient of defeat, Serving not harassed right but chance and gain, Eric himself would keep them true.

SWEGN
Not thine, My second soul. Yet could I pardon him Who faltered, for the blow transcends! And were King Eric not in Yara where he dwells,
I would have seen his hand in this defeat,  
Whose stroke is like the lightning’s, silent, straight,  
Not to be parried.

**HARDICNUT**  
Sigurd smote, perhaps,  
But Eric’s brain was master of his stroke.

**SWEGN**  
The traitor Sigurd! For young Eric’s part  
In Olaf’s death, he did a warrior’s act  
Avenging Yarislaf and Hacon slain,  
And Fate, not Eric slew. But he who, trusted, lured  
Into death’s ambush, when the rebel seas  
Rejoicing trampled down the royal head  
They once obeyed, him I will some day have  
At my sword’s mercy.  
(to Ragnar who enters)  
Ragnar, does it come,  
The last assault, death’s trumpets?

**RAGNAR**  
Rather peace,  
If thou prefer it, Swegn. An envoy comes  
From Eric’s army.

**SWEGN**  
Ragnar, bring him in.  
*Ragnar goes out.*  

He treats victorious? When his kingdom shook,  
His party faltered, then he did not treat  
Nor used another envoy than his sword.  
(to Gunthar who enters, escorted by Ragnar)  
Earl Gunthar, welcome,—welcome more wert thou  
When loyal.
GUNTHAR
Ragnar, Swegn and Hardicnut,
Revolting Earls, I come from Norway’s King
With peace, not menace.

SWEGN
Where then all these days
Behind you lurked the Northerner?

GUNTHAR
Thou art
In his dread shadow and in your mountain lair
Eric surrounds you.

SWEGN (contemptuously)
I will hear his words.

GUNTHAR
Eric, the King, the son of Yarislaf,
To Swegn, the Earl of Trondhjem. “I have known
The causes and the griefs that raise thee still
Against my monarchy. Thou knowest mine
That raised me against thy father,—Hacon’s death,
My mother’s brother, butchered shamefully
And Yarislaf by secret sentence slain.
Elected by our peers I seized his throne.
But thou, against thy country’s ancient laws
Rebelling, hast preferred for judge the sword.
Respect then the tribunal of thy choice
And its decision. Why electest thou
In thy drear fastness on the wintry hills
To perish? Trondhjem’s earldom shall be thine,
And honours and wealth and state, if thou accept
The offer of thy lenient gods. Consider,
O Swegn, thy country’s wounds, perceive at last
Thy good and ours, prolong thy father’s house.”
I expect thy answer.
SWEGN
I return to him
His proffered mercy. Let him keep it safe
For his own later use.

GUNTHAR
Thou speakest high.

SWEGN
I have the snow for friend and, if it fails,
The arms of death are broad enough for Swegn,
But not subjection.

GUNTHAR
For their sake thou lov’st,
Thy wife’s and sister’s, yield.

RAGNAR
Thou art not wise.
This was much better left unsaid.

SWEGN
It seems
Your pastime to insult the seed of Kings. Yet why
Am I astonished if triumphant mud
Conceives that the pure heavens are of its stuff
And nature? To the upstart I shall yield,
The fortune-fed adventurer, the boy
Favoured by the ironic Gods? Since fell
By Sigurd’s treachery and Eric’s fate
In resonant battle on the narrow seas
Olaf, his children had convinced the world,
I thought, of their great origin. Men have said,
“Their very women have souls too great to cry
For mercy even from the Gods.” His Fates
Are strong indeed when they compel our race
To hear such terms from his! Go, tell thy King,
Swegn of the ancient house rejects his boons.
Not terms between us stand, but wrath, but blood.
I would have flayed him on a golden cross
And kept his women for my household thralls,
Had I prevailed. Can he not do as much
That he must chaffer and market Norway’s crown?
These are the ways of Kings, strong, terrible
And arrogant, full of sovereignty and might.
Force in a King’s his warrant from the Gods.
By force and not by bribes and managements
Empires are founded! But your chief was born
Of huckstering earls who lived by prudent gains.
How should he imitate a royal flight
Or learn the leap of Kings upon their prey?

GUNTHAR
Swegn Olafson, thou speakest fatal words.
Where lodge thy wife and sister? Dost thou know?

HARDICNUT
Too far for Eric’s reach.

GUNTHAR
Earl, art thou sure?

SWEGN
What means this question?

GUNTHAR
That the Gods are strong
Whom thou in vain despisest, that they have dragged
From Sweden into Eric’s dangerous hands
Hertha and Aslaug, that the evil thou speakst
Was fatally by hostile Powers inspired.
SWEGN
Thou liest! They are safe and with the Swede.

GUNTHAR
I pardon thy alarm the violent word.
Earl Swegn, canst thou not see the dreadful Gods
Have chosen earth's mightiest man to do their will?
What is that will but Norway’s unity
And Norway’s greatness? Canst thou do the work?
Look round on Norway by a boy subdued,
The steed that even Olaf could not tame
See turn obedient to an unripe hand.
Behold him with a single petty pace
Possessing Sweden. Sweden once subdued,
Thinkst thou the ships that crowd the Northern seas
Will stay there? Shall not Britain shake, Erin
Pray loudly that the tempest rather choose
The fields of Gaul? Scythia shall own our yoke,
The Volga's frozen waves endure our march,
Unless the young god's fancy rose-ensnared
To Italian joys attracted amorously
Should long for sunnier realms or lead his high
Exultant mind to lord in eastern Rome.
What art thou but a pebble in his march?
Consider, then, and change thy fierce response.

HARDICNUT
Deceives the lie they tell, thy reason, Swegn?
Earl Gunthar may believe, who even can think
That Yarislaf begot a god!

SWEGN

GUNTHAR

SWEGN

GUNTHAR
I pity, Swegn, thy rash and obstinate soul.

He goes out.
SWEGN
Aslaug would scorn me yielding, even now
And even for her. He has unnerved my will,
The subtle tyrant! O, if this be true,
My Fate has wandered into Eric’s camp,
My soul is made his prisoner. Friends, prepare
Resistance; he’s the thunderbolt that strikes
And threatens only afterwards. It is
Our ultimate battle.

HARDICNUT  On the difficult rocks
We will oppose King Eric and his gods.
Scene 2

Swegn with his earls and followers in flight.

**SWEGN**
Swift, swift into the higher snows, where Winter
Eternal can alone of universal things
Take courage against Eric to defend
His enemies. O you little remnant left
Of many heroes, save yourselves for Fate.
She yet may need you when she finds the man
She lifts perpetually, too great at last
Even for her handling.

**HARDICNUT**
Ragnar, go with him,
While I stand here to hinder the pursuit
Or warn in time. Fear not for me, assailed.
Leave, Ragnar, leave me; I am tired at last.

*All go out upward except Hardicnut.*

Here then you reach me on these snows. O if my death
Could yet persuade indignant Heaven to change

[Scene incomplete]
Act V

Eric’s Palace.

Scene 1

ERIC
Not by love only, but by force and love.
This man must lower his fierceness to the fierce,
He must be beggared of the thing left, his pride,
And know himself for clay, before he will consent
To value my gift. He would not honour nor revere
This unfamiliar movement of my soul
But would contempt and think my seated strength
Had changed to trembling. Strike the audience-bell,
Harald. The master of my stars is he
Who owns no master. Odin, what is this play,
Thou playest with thy world, of fall and rise,
Of death, birth, greatness, ruin? The time may come
When Eric shall not be remembered! Yes,
But there’s a script, there are archives that endure.
Before a throne in some superior world
Bards with undying lips and eyes still young
After the ages sing of all the past
And the immortal Children hear. Somewhere
In this gigantic world of which one grain of dust
Is all our field, Eternal Memory keeps
Our great things and our trivial equally
To whom the peasant’s moans above his dead
Are tragic as a prince’s fall. Some say
Atomic Chance put Eric here, Swegn there,
Aslaug between. O you revealing Gods,
But I have seen myself and know though veiled
The immortality that thinks in me,
That plans and reasons. Masters of Norway, hail!
For all are masters here, not I alone
Who am my country’s brain of unity,
Your oneness. Swegn’s at last in Norway’s hands,
Who shook our fates. And what shall Norway do with Swegn,
One of her mightiest?

GUNTHAR

If his might submits
Then, Eric, let him live. We cannot brook
These discords always.

ERIC

Norway cannot brook.
Therefore he must submit. Bring him within.
We’ll see if this strong iron can be bent,
This crudeness bear the fire. Swegn Olafson,
Hast thou considered yet thy state? hast thou
Submitted to the gods; or must we, Swegn,
Consider now thy sentence?

SWEGN

I have seen
My dire misfortunes, I have seen myself
And know that I am greater. Do thy will,
Since what the son of Yarislaf commands,
The son of Olaf bears!

ERIC

Thou wilt not yield?

SWEGN
My father taught me not the word.
ERIC

Shall I?
Thou hast forgotten, Swegn, thy desperate words.
Or were they meant only for the free snows,
And here retracted?

SWEGN
Son of Yarislaf, they stand.
I claim the cross I would have nailed thee on,
I claim the flayer’s knife.

ERIC
These for thyself.
And for thy wife and sister, Swegn?

SWEGN
Alas!

ERIC
I think thy father taught thee not that word,
But I have taught thee. Since thou lovest yet,—
No man who says that he will stand alone,
Swegn, can afford to love,—thou then art mine
Inevitably. He must be half a god
Who can oppose Thor’s anger, Odin’s will
Nor dream of breaking. Such the gods delight in,
Raising or smiting; such in the gods delight,
Raised up or smitten. But thou wast always man
And canst not now be more. Thou vauntst thy blood,
Thy strength? Thou art much stronger, so thou sayst,
Than thy misfortunes. Art thou stronger, Swegn,
Than theirs? Can all thy haughty pride of race
Or thy heart’s mightiness undo my will
In whose strong hands they lie? Swegn Olafson,
The gods are mightier than thy race and blood,
The gods are mightier than thy arrogant heart.
They will not have one violent man oppose
His egoism, his pride and his desire
Against a country’s fate. Use then thy eyes
And learn thy strength.

At a sign of his hand Aslaug and
Hertha are brought in.

Thou hast no strength,
For thou and these are only Eric’s slaves
Who have been his stubborn hinderers. Therefore Fate,
Whose favourite and brother I have grown,
Turned wroth with you and dragged you all into my grasp.
I will that you should live and yield. These yield,
But thou withstandest wisdom, Fate and love
Allied against thee. Swegn Olafson, submit,
Stand by my side and share thy father’s throne.

SWEGN (after a silence)
Yes, thou art fierce and subtle! Let them pronounce
My duty’s preference if not my heart’s,
To them or Right.

ERIC
O narrow obstinate heart!
Had this been for thy country or a cause
Men worship, then it would indeed have been
A noble blindness, but thou serv’st thy pride,
Swegn, son of Olaf, not the noble cause
Of God or man or country. Look now on these.
I give thee the selection of their fate.
If these remain my slaves, an upstart’s, Swegn,
Who yet are Olaf’s blood and Norway’s pride,
I swear ’tis thou that mak’st them so. Now choose.
(Swegn is silent)

How sayst thou,
Swegn Olafson, shall these be Eric’s thralls?
Wilt thou abide by their pronouncement, Swegn?
Aslaug and Hertha, see your brother and lord,
This mighty captive, royal once, now fallen
And helpless in my hands. I wish to spare
His mightiness, his race, his royal heart;
But he prefers the cross instead, prefers
Your shame — thy brother, Aslaug,—Hertha, he.
Thy spouse consents to utmost shame for both
If from the ages he can buy this word,
“Swegn still was stubborn.” That to him is all.
He who forgot to value Norway’s will,
Forgets to value now your pride, your love.
This was not royal, nor like Olaf’s son!
Come, will you speak to him, will you persuade?
Walk there aside awhile; aim at his heart.
Hertha, my subject, Aslaug, thou my thrall,
Save, if he will, this life.

**SWEGN**

’Tis thus we meet,—
Were not the snows of Norway preferable,
Daughter of Olaf?

**ASLAUG**

They were high, but cold.

**HERTHA**

Wilt thou not speak to Hertha, Swegn, my lord?

**SWEGN**

Hertha, alas, thy crooked scheming brain
That brought us here.

**HERTHA**

The gods use instruments,
Not ask their counsel. O Swegn, accept the gods
And their decision.

**ASLAUG**

Must we live always cold?
O brother, cast the snows out of thy heart.
Let there be summer.

**HERTHA**
Yield, husband, to the sun.
There is no shame in yielding to the gods.

**ASLAUG**
Nor to a god, although his room be earth
And his body mortal.

**SWEGN**
There was an Aslaug once
Whose speech had other grandeurs. Can it find
In all its sweet and lofty harmonies
The word or argument that can excuse thy fall,
O not to me, but to that worshipped self
Thou wast, my sister?

**ASLAUG**
I have no argument except my heart
Nor need excuse for what I glory in.
Brother, were we not always one? 'Tis strange
That I must reason with thee.

**SWEGN**
O, thou knewest.
Therefore I fell, therefore my strength is gone,
And where a god's magnificence lived once,
Here, here 'tis empty. O inconstant heart,
Thou wast my Fate, my courage, and at last
Thou hast gone over to my enemy,
Taking my Fate, my courage. I will hear
No words from such. Thou wouldst betray what's left,
Until not even Swegn is left to Swegn,
But only a coward's shadow.
Act V, Scene 1

HERTHA
Hear me, Swegn.

SWEGN
Ah, Hertha! what hast thou to say to me?

HERTHA
Save me, my lord, from my own punishment,
Forgetting my deserts.

SWEGN
Alas! thy love,
Though great, was never wise, and must it ask
So huge a recompense? Thou hadst myself.
Thou askst my honour.

ASLAUG
Will this persuade thee? I have nothing else.

SWEGN
Thou only and so only couldst prevail.
O thou hast overcome my strength at last.
King, thou hast conquered. Not to thee I yield,
But those I loved are thy allies. From these
Recall thy wrath and on my head pronounce
What doom thou wilt, though yielding is doom enough
For Swegn of Norway.

ERIC
Abjure rebellion then; receive my boons,
Receive my mercy.

SWEGN
Mercy. It is received.
Let all the world hear Olaf’s son abjure
His birth and greatness. I accept — accept!
King Eric’s boons, King Eric’s mercy. O torture!
The spirit of Olaf will no more sit still
Within me. O though thou slaughter these with pangs,
I will not yield. Take, take thy mercy back.

ERIC
I take it back. What wouldst thou in its stead?

SWEGN
Do what thou wilt with these and me. I have done!

ERIC
Thou castst thy die, thou weak and violent man, I will cast mine
And conquer.

SWEGN
I have endured the worst.

ERIC
Not so.
Thou thinkest I will help thee to thy death,
Allowing the blind grave to seal thy eyes
To all that I shall do to these. Learn, Swegn,
I am more cruel! Thou shalt live and see
On these my vengeance. Go, Aslaug, and return
Robed as thou wast upon the night thou knowest
Wearing thy dagger, wearing too thy ring.

SWEGN
What wilt thou do with her? God! what wilt thou do?
O wherefore have I seen and taken back love
Into a heart had shut itself to all
But death and greatness?

ERIC
I will inflict on them
What thou canst not endure to gaze upon —
Or if thou canst, then with that hardness live
Eric

As dancing-girls these women came to me. As dancing-girls I keep them. Thou shalt see Aslaug of Norway at her trade — to dance Before me and my courtiers. That begins, There’s more behind, unless thou change thy mood.

Swegn

Thou seest, Swegn. Shall I command the dance? Shall this be the result of Olaf’s house?

Swegn

Daughter of Olaf, wilt thou then obey?

Aslaug

Yes, since thou lov’st me not, my brother Swegn, Whom else should I obey, save him I love? If thou hadst loved me still, I should not need.

Eric

Dance.
SWEGN
No. Stay, Aslaug. Since thou bad’st me love
Thee, not my glory, as indeed I must
To save the house of Olaf from this shame, —
Whose treacherous weakness works for him and thee, —

ERIC
Pause not again — for pause is fatal now.

SWEGN
King, I have yielded, I accept thy boons.
Heir of a starveling Earl, I bow my head
Even to thy mercies. I am Olaf’s son,
Yet yield — that name remember, speak this word —
I shall be faithful to my own disgrace.
O fear not, King, I can be great again.

ERIC
Without conditions hast thou yielded?

SWEGN
No.
Let these be spared all shame — for that I yield.
My honour has a price — and O ’tis small.

ERIC
That’s given. Without terms besides?

SWEGN
One prayer.
Give me a dungeon deep enough, O King,
To hide my face from all these eyes.

ERIC
Swear then,
Whatever prison I assign thee, be it wide
Or narrow, to observe its state, its bounds
And do even there my will.

SWEGN *with a gesture*
That too is sworn!
Let Thor and Odin witness to my oath.

ERIC
Four prisons I assign to Olaf’s son.
Thy palace first in Trondhjem, Olaf’s roof —
This house in Yara, Eric’s court — thy country
To whom thou yieldest, Norway — and at last
My army’s head when I invade the world.

SWEGN *amazed and doubtful*
Thou hast surprised me, Eric, with an oath
And circumvented.

ERIC
Hertha, to thy lord
Return unharmed — thou seest thou wast safe
As in his dearest keeping. Take, Hertha,
Trondhjem with thee and Olaf’s treasures; sit
The second in the land, beneath our throne.

SWEGN
Eric, enough. Have I not yielded? Here
Let thy boons rest.

ERIC
’Tis truth. For my next boon
Is to myself. Look not upon this hand
I clasp in mine, although the fairest hand
That God has made. Observe this ring instead
And recognise it.

GUNTHAR
It is Freya’s ring
On Aslaug’s hand; she who once wears it sits
Thenceforth on Norway’s throne.

ERIC

Possess thy father’s chair
Intended for thee always from the first,
Nor be amazed that in these dancing robes
I seat her here, for they increase its pomp
More than imperial purple. Think not, Swegn,
Thy sister shamed or false who came to me,
Spilling my blood and hers to give thee back thy crown,
A violent and mighty purpose such
As only noble hearts conceive; and only
She yielded to that noble heart at last
Because of Odin’s pressure.

SWEGN

So they came.
Aslaug, thou soughtst my throne, but findst it thine.
I grudge it not to thee — for thy great heart
Deserved it. Eric, thou hast won at last,
Now only.

ERIC

I could not shame thy sister, Swegn,
Save by my wife’s disgrace, and this was none
But only a deceit to prove thy heart
And now thou seest thou couldst not have rebelled
Except by violence to Olaf’s seed
That must again rule Norway.

SWEGN

Eric, for thy boons,
They hurt not now, take what return thou wilt,
For I am thine. Thou hast found out the way
To save from me thy future. It is secured
Even with my heart’s strings.
Act V, Scene 1

ERIC
Swegn, I too have boons
To ask of thee.

SWEGN
Let them be difficult then,
If thou wouldst have me grant them.

ERIC
Swegn, excuse and love
Thy comrade Hardicnut, for he intended
A kind betrayal.

SWEGN
This is nothing, King.
His act my heart had come to understand
And it has pardoned.

ERIC
Forgive then Swegn, dearest,
Sigurd, thy foe, as I have pardoned first
My father’s slaughterer. This thing is hard.

SWEGN
He’s pardoned, not forgiven. Let him not come
Too often in my sight.

ERIC
The gods have won.
Let this embrace engulf our ended strife,
Brother of Aslaug.

SWEGN
Husband of my sister,
Thou assum’st our blood and it ennobles thee
To the height of thy great victories — this thy last
And greatest. Thou hast dealt with me as a King,
Then as a brother. Thou adornst thy throne.

ERIC
Rest, brother, from thy hardships, toils and wars
Until I need the sword that matched with mine,
To smite my foemen.

Aslaug, what thinkst thou?
If thou art satisfied, all was well done.

ASLAUG
Thou hast the tyrant in thy nature still,
And so I love thee best, for then I recognise
My conqueror. O what canst thou do but well?
For in thy every act and word I see
The gods compel thee.

ERIC
O thou hast changed me with thy starry eyes,
Daughter of Olaf, and hast made me a man
Where was but height and iron; all my roots
Of action, mercy, greatness, enterprise,
Sit now transplanted to thy breast, O charm,
O noble marvel! From thy bosom my strength
Comes out to me. Mighty indeed is love,
Thou sangst of, Aslaug, once, the golden hoop
Mightier, swifter than the warrior’s sword.
Dost thou remember what thou cam’st to do,
Aslaug, from Gothberg?

ASLAUG (wondering)
Only ten days ago
I came from Gothberg!

She turns with a laugh
and embraces Eric.

ERIC
The gods have spoken since and shown their hand.
They seal our eyes and drive us, but at last
Our souls remember when the act is done,
That it was fated. Aslaug, now for us
The world begins again, — our world, beloved,
Since once more we — who since the stars were formed
Playing the game of games by Odin’s will
Have met and parted — parted, meet again
For ever.