



Preview Script

AD79

A Musical Play by Sarah Corbett, Phil Corbett
and Andy Durham

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By Sarah Corbett, Phil Corbett and Andy Durham

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AD79

By Sarah Corbett, Phil Corbett and Andy Durham

Cast of Characters:

Principals

- Male Dog** - a stray, stands up to talk when no humans are about, drops to all fours otherwise
- Female Dog (Iris)** - similar actions to Male Dog. Lives with the family of Claudius
- Benitus** - a local politician, not averse to underhand or illegal methods of persuasion
- Valeria** - his wife; a scheming, manipulative, pampered person
- Stephanus** - a city shopkeeper
- Maria** - his wife
- Julia** - a young lady, in love with and made pregnant by Benitus
- Octavius** - a demobbed soldier, knows where Benitus keeps his money - and how to get it
- Death** - invisible to most until just before their time has come. Written as a female character, but could be male.
- Helvius** - a male slave, offered his freedom by Claudius, his Master
- Ceia** - a female slave, in love with Helvius but works for Benitus

Supporting Cast

- Julius - another demobbed soldier, Octavius's long-time friend
- Claudius - a wealthy merchant
- Marcella - his wife
- Claudia - teenage daughter of Claudius and Marcella
- Jana - a younger teenage daughter of Claudius and Marcella
- Herculus - secretary to Benitus, plots with Octavius to steal Benitus's money
- Decimus - an old man who senses approaching doom
- Agostus - a resident
- Petronia - a resident
- Nicodemus - a resident
- Massima - a resident
- Quinta - a resident
- Paola - a resident
- Pietra - a resident
- Lucretia - a resident
- Chorus of other residents and customers.

Scenes

Act 1	Scene 1	Overlooking Pompeii. August 21st
	Scene 2	The Merchant's House. August 21st
	Scene 3	The Home Of Benitus. August 21st
	Scene 4	The Forum, outside the Olive Bar. August 22nd
	Scene 5	The Forum, outside the Olive Bar. August 22 nd
Act 2	Scene 1	The Forum, outside the Olive Bar.
	Scene 2	The Home Of Benitus. August 24th
	Scene 3	The Merchant's House. August 24th
	Scene 4	The Forum, Outside The Olive Bar. August 24th
	Scene 5	The Home Of Benitus. August 24 th
	Scene 6	The Forum, Outside The Olive Bar. August 24 th
	Scene 7	The Home Of Benitus. August 24 th
	Scene 8	The Forum, Outside The Olive Bar. August 24 th
	Scene 9	The Home Of Benitus. August 24 th
	Scene 10	The Merchant's House. August 24th
	Scene 11	The Home Of Benitus. August 24 th

Musical Numbers

1) Gaudiamus Igitur (Let Us Rejoice)	Chorus
2) The Soldiers Song	Octavius (with Julius and small chorus)
3) I Can Wait	Julia
4) A Partly Political Broadcast	Benitus and Octavius
5) Song Of Freedom	Helvius and Ceia
6) Pressure Rising	Chorus (in 2 groups - Hard Corps & Lava Louts)
~~ Interval ~~	
7) Time Moves On	Solo (any cast member)
8) The Cross I Have To Bear	Valeria and Julia
9) The Sky Falls Down	Full Cast with solo (any cast member)
10) Bring Out The Dead	Death (with male chorus)
11) Crossing The River	Octavius, Dogs, Helvius/Ceia, Benitus & Chorus
12) The Roll Call	Full Cast (with optional solo parts)

ACT ONE

Scene 1 - Overlooking Pompeii. August 21st

Two dogs enter on all fours, then stand up on two legs and survey the scene in front of them.

Male Dog Ahhh, Pompeii. It's a beautiful sight, isn't it?

Female Dog It's okay. I can't stay long up here with you, you know that.

Male Dog What, you're not savouring this beautiful view? Uncultured barbarian!

Female Dog I'm not a stray like you. My family will miss me.

Male Dog Well, why not run away with me? Be a stray?

Female Dog You know why.

Male Dog Look, life is good for me here, as it is for all of the denizens of this paradise. Look around you at the prosperity, (*pointing*) over there the bay of Naples, aiding the trade and manufacture, and the rich fertile slopes of Mount Vesuvius, over there (*points again*). The pickings are rich, even for a stray. Add to that the perfect climate, the mineral water springs, and the exquisite views ... who needs to be owned by a family?

Female Dog You know why I stay. My family treat me well.

Male Dog Living in Pompeii, life treats you well. Let the good times roll.

Enter cast.

Music #1 - 'Gaudeamus Igitur' (Let Us Rejoice While We Are Young)

Chorus *Gaudiamus igitur. Iuvenus dum summus.*

Soloist *They say that in Pompei good times are shared by all
Sun is shining, birds are singing, crops are growing tall
So sing with us, come on, sing with us!
Let us rejoice because we are young!
We hope the laughter and the music never stop
we are young and full of fun
let's dance until we drop!
It's springtime - our day has just begun'*

Chorus *The gods are smiling down upon our youth
The heavens cannot lie, they always tell the truth!
We might have troubles but they're far away
Think about tomorrow when tomorrow's yesterday
The pace of life is fast but we don't care
No need to worry we've got time to spare
It seems that here the sun will always shine
And life's for living now in AD79*

Soloist *Let us rejoice because we are young!
Bright and breezy, free and easy, got no long term plan
We're in ascendancy - enjoy it while we can
So sing with us, come on, sing with us!
Let us rejoice because we are young!
Perhaps tomorrow we may all have had our fill
But until the music's fading let us linger still
And share our joy with everyone.'*

Chorus *The gods are smiling down upon our youth
The heavens cannot lie, they always tell the truth!
We might have troubles but they're far away
Think about tomorrow when tomorrow's yesterday
The pace of life is fast but we don't care
No need to worry we've got time to spare
It seems that here the sun will always shine
And life's for living now in AD79*

Chorus 1 *Time marches on*

Chorus 2 *Just as night follows day*
Chorus 1 *Things may not be constant*
Chorus 2 *They may not stay this way*
Chorus 1 *Everything must change*
Chorus 2 *And it's not part of your plan*
Chorus 1 *Best to sing and smile*
Chorus 2 *Rejoice while you can*
Chorus *Gaudiamus Igitur (repeated 8 times)*
Soloist *Let us rejoice in the sun*
Because it's hardly begun
And soon our worry may come
Rejoice in the sun!
All *Gaudiamus igitur. Iuvenus dum summus.*

Exit Cast.

Claudia *(Offstage)* Iris? Here girl. Where are you? Iris? *(she whistles)* Iris?
Female Dog That's me. I need to go.
Male Dog I'll see you around soon.

The female dog leaves on all fours, barking. Enter Stephanus, examining the olives on a tree. The male dog goes down on all fours.

Stephanus Hello boy. What are you doing all the way out here? *(The dog barks. Stephanus goes to him and hands him something to eat).* Here, have some of the wife's boar sausage. Not exactly delicious, *(taps nose)* but keep it between us, eh?

Enter Maria.

Maria Oh no, Stephanus, you're not feeding that stray again are you? No wonder he's always hanging around our bar, scrounging and putting off our customers.
Stephanus Look woman, it's a beautiful day, our business is booming, our olive's are ripening nicely - why not spread a little of our good fortune?
Maria You really shouldn't encourage him - he's probably riddled with fleas and vermin.

The male dog stands on 2 legs.

Male Dog Hah, what do they know? Fleas are a sign of my popularity. I'm so great they all want a piece of me. *(He scratches himself).* And you know what they say - you're never alone with fleas.

The dog goes back onto 2 legs, and barks. At that moment Benitus, and his wife Valeria enter, in a carriage.

Maria Speaking of vermin...

Valeria turns to her husband, a sneer on her face.

Valeria Oh no, it's that disgusting little man from the olive bar, and his drudge of a wife. Please say we can just go past them.
Benitus It's an election year. I need to keep all the voters sweet, however distasteful. And vulgar though they may be, unfortunately this man is entitled to a vote.
Valeria You pay for the games every year - surely that's enough for them? Without having to *(shudders)* mix with them. *(With contempt)* You're only standing for magistrate.
Benitus *(With venom)* Yes, my dear, but Duumviri is the obvious stepping stone, if I'm ever to come to the notice of the senate, as you yourself are always pointing out.
Valeria As I continue to steer your career, you mean. Which you could do for yourself if you weren't so useless ... if only I'd been a born a man, I'd already be in the senate!

As she shakes her head, Benitus suddenly lunges across the carriage, and grabs her by the throat.

Benitus And you'd do well to remember that you're not a man. You are my property to do with as I please - so keep me sweet.

They are interrupted by Stephanus from outside.

Stephanus Hail there, Benitus. May I interest you in some of the wife's delicious wild boar sausage?

Benitus emerges from the carriage, followed by Valeria. He is now in 'Politician' mode.

Benitus Why, yes, Stepheus, that is a most agreeable suggestion. Thank you.

Stephanus Stephanus.

Benitus Whatever. *(He takes the offered sausage from Stephanus. Then, to Maria).* Hail, good woman. And thanks indeed for your earthy fare. *(He bites into the sausage and grimaces. Stephanus grins to himself. Benitus chews, disgustedly).* Hmm, such pungent flavours.

Valeria shakes her head at his obsequiousness.

Stephanus So friend, what possible reason could you have for being away from this heaven on earth?

Benitus Business in Rome. Friends in the senate, with matters to discuss, *(checking himself)* and of course, representing Pompeii, and looking to send further business this way. You know how seriously I take my role here. I trust I can count on your, er *(he makes a hand gesture and whistles - a euphemism for a vote)* at election time?

Stephanus *(Nodding)* Of course. Rome, eh? Tell me, did you see the new Colosseum? Is it complete yet?

Benitus Just about. Truly magnificent. Rather puts our own little amphitheatre in the shade. Though that said, I have a rather special show lined up for later this year. *(To Valeria)* Isn't that right, my dear?

Valeria Hmm. If you're interested in that kind of thing. *(To Maria)* Speaking of which, who butchered your hair?

Maria *(Taken aback)* I, er ...

Valeria And your clothes. Oh dear. You know, you should have seen the outfits in Rome. So stylish, so chic, so ... *(looking Maria up and down)* ... elegant.

Maria *(Through gritted teeth)* Really?

Valeria Yes. Rome reminds one of just how boring provincial life and attitudes can be down here.

Maria Is that so?

Benitus Ha, yes quite. Come my dear, we must be on our way. *(He steers Valeria forcefully back to the carriage).* Well, I look forward to talking to you again soon.

Stephanus How about ...

Benitus ... must dash.

Exit Benitus and Valeria.

Maria I don't how you can bear to even talk to that man, and his ... trollop of a wife.

Stephanus He's important. And you heard him - he said he was sending lots of business Pompeii's way.

Maria And you believed that ... that self-serving hypocrite?

Stephanus Lots of Romans come here, for holidays and retirement. And more people means more customers for us. So I'll support anyone or anything that puts us on the map.

A pregnant girl, Julia, enters looking agitated.

Julia Have you by chance seen Benitus Maximius, the town magistrate?

Stephanus Why he ...

Maria *(Silencing him)* What do you want with him?

Julia That is a personal matter. *(She peers anxiously over their shoulders).* He promised me he would be back in town by today though.

Maria I see. Is it wise though, that you should be wandering around up here ... in your condition?

Julia What do you mean by that?

Stephanus You've just missed him, love. He went past the same way you've just come from, so I don't know how.

Julia Damn! Was he alone?

Maria No. He had that viper of a wife with him.

Stephanus casts his wife a look. Julia becomes more upset.

Julia But he promised me. He promised!

Stephanus Calm down love. Here, tell us what's wrong.

Julia *(Crying)* I can't! I can't!

She runs from the stage.

Stephanus What did I do?

Maria You're quite an innocent really, aren't you?

Stephanus *(Shrugging)* Come on then. Let's head back down to town. *(To Male Dog)* You coming boy?

Maria Oh no, he's staying here.

They leave. The dog gets up on two legs again.

Male Dog And people call dogs dirty. What tangled webs they weave!

Voices off-stage cause him to go back on four legs. The soldier, Octavius, enters with his friend, Julius. They stop and admire the view, while Octavius removes his rucksack.

Octavius *(Pointing)* Behold, Pompeii. Beautiful, is it not?

Julius Not bad, my friend, not bad. But then anything beats the insides of a barracks.

Octavius Very true. But then this *(he removes a bronze tablet from his rucksack)* means that I will never have to see one again. Twenty-five years service. Can you believe it?

Julius It seems hard to credit. But I have the scars to prove it, along with the service tablet.

Octavius Twenty-five years. We were so young when we joined up. So young. I never thought I would get to the end of it. Twenty-five years was a lifetime.

Julius Well think what we've seen in that time. The places we've been, the things we've done.

Octavius Some I would rather forget ...

Julius Jerusalem. I know. We lost a lot of good men there.

Octavius It's not only that. The army never gives you time to think, but since leaving, I've done nothing but reflect. There's fighting and there's fighting, but ultimately war was no way to make a living.

Julius Don't forget everything the army's given you. It's not all bad. Where would you have been otherwise?

Octavius I know, I know. But the brutality, the things we people do to each other. And the fact that it's without end. Always some new campaign to embark on, or area of the empire that needs defending. And if not that, the training, which was probably worse than the actual fighting. Is it ever really worth it? But I know I'm one of the lucky ones - at least I'm still here.

Music #2 - 'The Soldiers' Song'

Octavius *It's so long I've been a soldier
and I've travelled all the world
Now my sword is in its sheath
and my banners are all furled
And looking back at a soldier's life,
I've had many a friend but never a wife
And most of them are with me in my mind,
oh yeah, in my mind.
It's so long I've been a soldier,
and I've seen what no man should see
My body's torn and battered,
but my mind at least is free
I have the trophies that war can bring,
and looking back I'd not change a thing
But that's because I'd change the whole damn lot
oh yeah, the lot.'*

Soldiers *It's so long that we've been soldiers
and we never stopped at aught
We thrilled, we killed, the blood was spilled,
we never gave a thought
Oh the fight was fought and the battle met
and with any luck we'll be home yet.*

Octavius *But that may all be only in your dreams
It's so long I've been a soldier,*

*but now I've paid my dues!
I'm to wear the finest garments
and the softest leather shoes.
The ground was hard and strewn with dead,
the earth was stained, the rivers red
And still we marched towards a brighter day oh yeah
Why did we even go there anyway?'*

Exit Soldiers.

Octavius Now I have finally got Roman Citizenship, I have a good feeling about this place. It's going to make me rich. Are you sure you won't stick around? I could cut you in. And I'd feel better about having someone around I knew and trusted.

Julius Enough! I don't want to hear of your dodgy scams. Or be involved. I've got a nice little plot waiting for me down in Tarentum in the south. I fancy the quiet farmer's life.

Octavius Well my friend, then I guess this is where we part company. Keep in touch.

They shake hands.

Julius And you drop in and see me down in Tarentum. Just don't bring any trouble with you!

They hug, slapping each other's backs before Octavius turns, picks up his rucksack, and leaves. Death enters, as Julius remains, staring down at the view.

Death Admiring the view?

Julius *(Surprised)*. It's very nice. But it's not really my scene. I'm after somewhere a little quieter.

Death *(To itself)* Yes. This place is going to keep me busy. Very busy indeed. *(To Julius)* Julius Lautius.

Julius *(looking at Death curiously)*. Do I know you, friend?

Death You have sent a few my way, but we have not previously been acquainted.

Julius I don't understand you?

Death Smell me - am I not familiar?

Julius sniffs. He seems to recognise something.

Julius I know that smell ... the battlefield ... my father. Wait! No, it cannot be! Not you! Not now, not here!

Death That is not your call to make, Julius Lautius.

Julius But ... but ... why here? I have been through so much - survived so much. Sickness and disease. Injuries and punctures of the flesh. I am a veteran of countless skirmishes and battles. I have stood and faced blood-crazed barbarians with axeheads the size of large dogs. And look, *(he tears open his tunic)* I am scarred from my throat to my pelvis. And I have survived.

Death I know. I saw. But it wasn't your time. Now is.

Julius But my retirement plot! My plans! So much still to do. This isn't fair!

Death Who ever said I had to be fair?

Julius And if I decline? If I refuse to accompany you?

Death *(Smiling gently)* You don't understand. Death is all around you. *(Indicating the dog)*. That crazed dog may suddenly lunge at you. That bee *(pointing)* could fly down your throat and choke you. Your lunch may have been poisoned, and it could take effect at any moment. *(Julius looks alarmed and clutches his stomach. Death smiles and shakes its head)*. You have numerous organs vital to life, any one may give out at any time.

Julius So ... so how?

Death It's straightforward for you. Your heart has beat its allocated number of beats. It will beat no more. Time is up.

Julius Will ... will it hurt?

Death points down and reveals a pair of legs on the floor, Julius' legs.

Death *(Gently)* It's already happened. *(Julius looks at 'his' body, shocked)*. Come, let's admire the view from another vantage point. *(Death leads Julius to the side of the stage. As they pass the dog, he growls angrily at Death, who smiles at him serenely)*. Yes, this place is going to keep me extremely busy indeed.

Death and Julius exit. The dog runs whining, from the other end of the stage.

Scene 2 - The Merchant's House. August 21st

The male dog enters quickly and runs past a scene of Helvius, the slave boy, in front of a blackboard teaching the merchant's daughters, Claudia and Jana. Their attention is on Helvius, but they are distracted when the male dog starts barking at the female dog. She barks back and makes a motion to the side, with her head. They go out of sight of the others and stand on two legs.

Female Dog You shouldn't come here! My family will throw you out if they see you.

Male Dog *(Breathlessly)* I had to come and tell you! You won't believe what I saw up in the hills!

Female Dog Well, what is it?

Male Dog A figure, in black. Only half seen, half smelt, half sensed. But my hackles went up ... such a strong presence. Something ... bad.

Female Dog Oh, stop being so silly. It's probably tied to those bad dreams you've been having. Doom and destruction. You're taking things far too seriously.

Male Dog Look, we have a sense of these things, us canines.

Female Dog I don't.

Male Dog That's because you're too busy being pampered here. But those of us who are true to our natures ...

Female Dog Who scrounge and live off humans, but offer them nothing back.

Male Dog Who retain their freedom and integrity.

Female Dog Maybe if you settled down with a nice family you'd stop being so paranoid.

Male Dog Not that again. Look, I know what I saw.

Female Dog Well, what was it then?

Male Dog I ... don't know. I've been getting a bad feeling. Maybe it's time for me to move on.

Female Dog What? You were only saying earlier how much you loved this place.

Male Dog I know. Maybe I'm just getting itchy paws.

Female Dog Well, I'm serious. I think it's time you thought about settling down.

At that moment, Helvius, the slave boy, interrupts them, and they drop down on to four legs.

Helvius *(To Male Dog)* Come on, out of here!

Claudia Oh, let him stay. He's Iris's friend.

Helvius If your father finds out I've been entertaining waifs and strays, I'll be for the high jump. He has to go. Now shoo!

Claudia & Jana Owwww!

As the male dog is ushered off the stage, he turns and barks at Iris, who barks back. Helvius returns to the blackboard.

Helvius Right then, back to arithmetic.

Claudia & Jana Owwww!

Claudia Helvius, how high is Vesuvius?

Helvius Well, there is a way of calculating that, using mathematics.

Jana Is it the tallest mountain in the whole of the empire?

Helvius I should think not. In fact, it's not even a mountain.

The girls gasp.

Claudia My father says it's a mountain.

Helvius Yes, it's a common misconception around these parts. And amongst Romans in general. But it's not a mountain.

Jana What is it then?

Claudia A hill?

Helvius No, not that either. It is in fact a volcano.

The girls gasp again.

Claudia A volcano!

Helvius *(Letting the words hang in the air).* Extinct of course. But a volcano, none the less. Identified by the great geographer Strabo. And naturally being a Greek, he knew his stuff.

Jana But our father says it's a mountain.

Helvius Well, who am I to argue with your father? But Strabo on the other hand ...

Claudia What's it like ... being Greek?
Helvius Well, it's like being Roman, of course ... except with having a much bigger brain.

The girls giggle.

Claudia Will you teach us some Greek words again?
Helvius Maybe, once we've finished this arithmetic.

Claudius, the merchant, and his wife, Marcella, enter unseen, and watch the happy scene of Helvius teaching the girls.

Marcella He's good, isn't he? And the girls do love him so.
Claudius Yes, he's been a good purchase. Buying Greek certainly paid off.
Marcella So, shall we tell him the news now then?
Claudius I don't know!
Marcella Oh, come on. Before we go to Rome. Give him something to think about and plan while we're gone.
Claudius Oh, alright then.

They walk in to where Helvius is teaching.

Claudia & Jana Beta plus Omega ...
Claudius What is this, my daughters learning Greek? Latin is the only language they'll need, the only language anyone needs!
Helvius I'm sorry sir, I didn't mean ...
Claudius *(Smiling)* Relax boy, I'm only pulling your leg. Now, Marcella and I would like a word with you, concerning your future with us.
Helvius If you're not happy with my work sir, I can ...
Claudius No, no. In fact it's the opposite. We're very happy with your work.
Marcella We think you've done a marvellous job with them.
Claudius Well, with maybe slightly too much emphasis on the Greek stuff. *(Marcella coughs)*. Well, yes anyway. The girls will have had all the education they'll need soon, and we've decided ...
Helvius *(Bowing his head)* You're going to sell me.
Claudius We've decided we'll give you your freedom.

Helvius looks up, unable to believe the news.

Claudius You'll be a freedman.
Helvius *(Smiling)* A freedman!
Marcella Tell him the other part.
Helvius There's more?
Claudius We've become aware of your ... 'friendship', with that girl, Ceia. We have decided that when we free you, we will give you a sum of money to put towards buying her freedom too.
Helvius *(Going down on his knees, unable to believe what he is hearing)*. Thank you!
Claudius However, a word of caution. Ceia is, as you know, the property of Benitus Maximus.
Marcella And the 'charming' Valeria Maximus.
Claudius And, as you are no doubt aware, he is a stubborn, and at times, fractious man. He would not welcome what he would see as my meddling in his domestic affairs. If he knows the money to free Ceia has come from me he may refuse to sell. He may refuse to sell anyway, such is his right. So to avoid getting anyone's hopes up, or causing 'friction' with the Maximus's, it is imperative that you keep this news to yourself.
Helvius Of course, of course, anything. Thank you so much.

Claudius nods, and tersely leaves the stage. Helvius runs off, barely able to contain his excitement. The girls beam at their mother, who gives them a hug.

Scene 3 - The Home Of Benitus. August 21st

Benitus and Julia are in the middle of a conversation - Julia is clearly upset, and Benitus is looking around shiftily. At the side of the stage, Valeria is listening to them unseen, as if through a closed door.

Julia *(In tears)* But ... but you promised! You promised!

Benitus *(Indicating her stomach)* And you promised me you could be discreet. And this in an election year! So it looks like we've both broken our promises.

Julia But surely ... everything you said ... our future together.

Benitus Ruined by you and your carelessness. Now get out of my sight, and out of my house. And if anyone spots you leaving ... !

Her face crumples further, and she runs off stage, while Valeria moves out of sight. Ceia, the slave girl enters from the other side, carrying a basket of dates. Benitus goes over to her.

Benitus *(Looking in her basket)* Stuffed dates, good girl. *(She looks at the ground. Benitus lifts her face, and stares into it).* Good girl ...

She turns her head away from him. They are disturbed by Valeria's voice off to the side.

Valeria *(Offstage)* Ceia? Where are you girl? *(Benitus makes himself scarce, and exits the stage. Valeria enters and goes to Ceia).* So here you are you lazy, indolent girl.

Helvius, the slave boy, comes into view. He watches the scene, hidden from Valeria and Ceia.

Ceia I had to fetch provisions, mistress. For tonight's banquet. But in the markets a mad old man ...

Valeria suddenly slaps Ceia, hard, around the face. She drops the basket of dates.

Valeria I'm not interested in your excuses. What I am concerned about is you making a fool of me. Of us.

Ceia But ...

Valeria slaps her again. From his vantage point, Helvius gasps and stands, as if he's going to intervene, but decides against this.

Valeria Don't think I don't know what you're like. Swanning around that market like you're something special. Well you're not. You're a possession. And a useless one at that. *(She goes to slap Ceia again who cringes away).* Can't you even take a slap properly? Do you know, thanks to your idleness, I had to dress myself this morning? And how long has cook been waiting for those dates?

Ceia I ...

Valeria Enough snivelling. *(Indicating the dates).* Pick those up. And if any of them are bruised, that'll be nothing compared to the bruising you'll get from me.

Ceia bends down and starts picking up the dates. As she does this, Valeria stamps on one of her hands. Ceia gives a brief cry, but dare not make a fuss. Valeria leaves, looking pleased with herself, while Ceia continues picking up the dates.

Helvius *(Whispered)* Ceia!

Ceia looks around, and spies Helvius, in his hidden vantage spot.

Ceia Helvius! What are you doing here? If they catch you we'll be in terrible trouble!

Helvius I know. But I just had to see you.

They hug.

Ceia *(Sobbing)* Oh Helvius. I've had a terrible morning. She insisted on stuffed dates, but they had sold out all over town, despite me leaving at the crack of dawn. And then I got followed by that creepy old man, Decimus. And then I got back here and ... and ...

Helvius I know. I saw. She's a vile woman. *(He clenches his fist)* I wish I could ... *(he makes a strangling motion)* but I can't. But I have some news. Exciting news.

At that point Benitus walks past, and hears their voices. Looking curious, he goes into Helvius's previous hiding spot, and listens in.

Ceia Well?

Helvius My master, Claudius. He has promised me my freedom once the girls have finished their education. Isn't that wonderful?

Ceia Oh Helvius, that's marvellous. I'm so happy for you.

She starts to cry.

Helvius Ceia, what's wrong?

Ceia I'm sorry. I really am pleased for you. But it just brings it home, my situation here.

Helvius Hey, come on.

Ceia It's getting worse, Helvius. I can do nothing right. She's always so angry. And him. *(She shivers)* I don't know how much longer I can cope, I really don't.

Helvius looks around furtively. Benitus bends in closer to listen.

Helvius Look. I was sworn to secrecy, but I think you need to know this. Claudius also said, that when he frees me, he will give me a sum. And that we can use it to try and buy your freedom from Benitus.

Ceia *(She gasps)* My freedom? Really?

Helvius But sssh! It must remain a secret. If Benitus finds out in advance, or Valeria, they would be sure to scupper our plans. *(Ceia puts her finger to her lips)*. Right, I must leave before I'm discovered.

Ceia *(Draping her arms over him)*. Helvius, thank you.

Helvius What for?

Ceia For giving me the one thing I thought I would never have ... hope.

Helvius smiles, looks around, and sneaks off. Smiling, Ceia walks off with her basket of dates. Benitus emerges from his hiding place.

Benitus Claudius, eh? *(Shouting)* Hercules? Where are you?

Enter Hercules, Benitus' secretary.

Herculus *(In a slimy manner)* Yes Master.

Benitus Hercules, it's just come to my attention that that upstart merchant, Claudius Valens, intends interfering in my household affairs. Did you know anything about this?

Herculus *(Checking in his ledger)* It was not something I had in writing, master. *(He scribbles in some notes)*.

Benitus Well, if you want the post of Aedile, Magistrate's secretary, surely that's the kind of thing you should know?

Herculus I have comprehensive notes on who is with you and against you in the Duumviri election, Master. Who has been paid, and who owes favours to whom. But, respectfully sir, I can't know every little thing.

Benitus If you want this post, you can. It will cost me a lot of money to get you elected, so I expect you to know everything about what goes on in this town.

Herculus Naturally Master. But we've not missed many money-making opportunities yet, have we Master?

Benitus Which is why I keep you on. Now back to Claudius. He intends freeing his slave tutor, and giving him money to purchase the slave girl from my household.

Herculus *(Shaking head)* A soft touch. A fool.

Benitus What has riled me is his arrogance. Who does he think he is? I run this town. I decide what happens!

Herculus What do you think should 'happen' in response to this then, master?

Benitus I think he should be taught a little lesson. Perhaps a few of the town's less desirable characters could be 'persuaded' to go to his premises and 'rearrange' them.

Herculus *(Smirking as he writes in his ledger again)*. I believe that can be arranged.

Benitus Of course it can. What's the point of being town magistrate if one doesn't have access to all of one's citizens? Including the low-life and scum. But ensure that there is no way the trail can lead back to us. I could do without any trace of scandal in an election year.

Herculus Naturally Master. Consider it done.

Benitus We'll make an aedile of you yet, Hercules.

Exit Benitus. Hercules walks across the stage, flicking through his ledger book. He doesn't notice Octavius entering from the other side. He jumps when he suddenly realises Octavius is there.

Octavius Greetings, Hercules. I trust you remember me?

Herculus looks as though he has seen a ghost.

Herculus You! Here!

Octavius Naturally. You've not forgotten about our little arrangement have you?

Herculus I ... you ... where is Didius?

Octavius Dead. But I am here to take his slice, as well as mine.

Herculus How ... how did you get in here?

Octavius You don't spend twenty-five years in the Roman army without learning a thing or two about breaching defences.

Herculus *(Trying to regain his composure)* Well, I must say, it's good to see you again.

Octavius Don't lie Herculus. Your sweating brow and shifty eyes tell me you're terrified. And with good reason. *(He taps at his scabbard)* I will not take kindly to any change of plan.

Herculus No listen. Everything still stands. I just wasn't expecting you yet. Why didn't you send word that you were coming?

Octavius Because the element of surprise is important. And I knew that a slimy maggot like you might well have laid on a most unwelcome reception party for me.

Herculus Octavius, please, you have to trust me.

Octavius Not in this lifetime, Herculus. So tell me, when do we begin?

Herculus Well it would be difficult soon, I mean ...

Octavius This is an election year, Herculus. I refuse to believe Benitus isn't collecting together the funds.

Herculus Oh well of course he has the funds, but ... *(Octavius touches the handle of his sword, making Herculus panic)*. Oh please, a couple of days, I need a couple of days ...

Octavius And what am I to do for that time? I am not exactly inconspicuous.

Herculus *(Thinking)* Weeell, I do have an idea. Instead of trying to hide yourself, which as you say will only draw attention to you anyway, why not put yourself about a bit?

Octavius How so?

Herculus Well, this is an election year. You could get yourself a high profile by pretending to be a candidate in the magistrate's election. You are after all a citizen now, such is your right!

Octavius And why should I want to do that?

Herculus Because no-one could guess at your real reason for being here. It's the perfect cover. And by the time your true motives are discovered, you, we ... will be long gone.

Octavius *(Appearing to weigh this up)*. Very well, I can see your logic. So what do I need to do?

Herculus Leave that to me. Trust me, by tomorrow everybody will know that Octavius is standing for magistrate.

Octavius And Benitus?

Herculus He will be furious at the competition, but it will keep him from the truth.

Octavius *(Smiling)* You are a piece of work, my friend. *(Threatening)* Just don't forget where your loyalties lie.

Herculus smiles, and they head off in different directions, giving each other suspicious backward glances. Lights down. Rumbling is heard.

Scene 4 - The Forum, outside the Olive Bar. August 22nd.

The male dog runs across the stage, chased by a few noisy market traders, a string of sausages hanging from his mouth. The olive bar owner and his wife, and a couple of customers come out to see what the noise is. Octavius is leaning casually against a wall, eating some olives. Stephanus suddenly notices the graffiti daubed on the wall of his bar : 'Vote Octavius for Duumviri - a fresh voice'.

Stephanus Oh no! Look at that!

There is a murmur amongst the customers.

Maria Not again!

Stephanus Who is this accursed Octavius?

Agostos I don't know, but I've seen a lot of that graffiti this morning.

Petronia Benitus must be furious, he will have expected to be unopposed again for the magistrate's job.

Nicodemus Well maybe it will make him a bit more generous with his inducements. I welcome this Octavius fellow whoever he is.

Agostos I wonder what he stands for, who he's representing?

The traders re-enter.

Stephanus What I want to know is who is going to clean this off my wall!
Maria Calm yourself down.
Nicodemus *(To the traders, indicating the graffiti)* What do you lot know about this?
Massima This graffiti appeared overnight, all over town. Someone's clearly been busy.
Quinta Well if this Octavius is going to do something about stray dogs, he'll get my vote.

There is a murmur of agreement.

Paola Maybe we should try and find out who he is, and put our case to him.
Pietra Yes, we market traders could be a powerful lobby.
Lucretia Can we afford to get involved though? Politics is an expensive business.
Massima And what about Benitus? He's not a man to cross. I don't know if we'd want to end up on the wrong side of him.

There is another murmur of agreement.

Quinta *(Pointing off stage)* No! That cursed dog's back again!

The traders bundle off, shouting, just as Ceia is entering. From the other side, Julia enters, and goes to Ceia, grabbing her, as she tries to walk past.

Julia Stop. I have something to ask you. It's important.
Ceia Leave me alone. I cannot be seen talking to you.
Julia The lady of the house. Valeria. Is she out?
Ceia *(Looking around to be sure no-one is watching)*. She was due to visit the actors at the theatre, with the Master's secretary, Hercules.
Julia So Benitus is alone at the house?
Ceia I believe so. *(Julia hugs herself. Then, Ceia nervously)*. Listen, I know it is not my place to say ...
Julia Then don't. I know already what you think. That he is married to another. That he is no good. That I am wasting my time. But none of you ... *(indicating the whole town)* none of you know Benitus as I do.

Music #3 - Julia's Lament - 'I Can Wait'

Julia *In the evening he says that he needs me,
In the daytime his love feels like hate,
It's only because I want him so much
That if I have to I know I can wait.
And if the fire of his feelings burn slow
While the flames of ambition burn bright,
I'll fan the embers, in the end I'll know that,
Everything is gonna be all right.*

Crowd *You think with your heart
And not with your head,
You're confused, perplexed and beguiled,
Look at your life, be realistic instead,
Is this the right world for your child?*

Julia *While the seeds of his love grow inside me
It seems I'm pushed from pillar to post,
First there's pleasure and then there's despair
Don't know if I'm real or a ghost.
And so I'll carry on haunting his nights
And I'll suffer the wrath of his days,
I'll wait with patience biding my time
Because I love him in so many ways.*

Crowd *You think with your heart
And not with your head,
You're confused, perplexed and beguiled,*

*Look at your life, be realistic instead,
Is this the right world for your child?*

Julia I... **Crowd** Dum dum dum, da da dum dum dum,
... can wait Da da dum, da da da dum. Dum dum da dah
I love him Aaah, aaah
In so many ways Dum dum, da da dah

Crowd Will this man make your babe a good father,
There's still time to start out anew,
He didn't ask if you wanted this child
Or indeed if the child wanted you.

[pause]

Crowd You think with your heart
And not with your head,
You're confused, perplexed and beguiled,
Look at your life, be realistic instead,
Is this the right world for your child?

Ceia and Julia return to their conversation.

Ceia Well, I have told you all I know. Now please let me go before anyone sees me talking to you.

She turns her head nervously, revealing a black eye and bruising. Julia leaves, watched by Agostos and Nicodemus.

Agostos Phwoar, eh?

Nicodemus Who? The slave girl?

Agostos Both. A pair of lovelies.

Nicodemus I don't know. That Julia has let herself go a little. And they say she's gone a bit ...

As he spins his finger around his ear, neither of them is aware of Petronia coming up behind them.

Agostos Ah, but her other 'assets' compensate for that.

Petronia (*Clipping Agostos round the ear*) I thought so! Out here, leching at other women while my back is turned.

Agostos Ow! This is man's talk, woman.

Petronia I'll give you man's talk. Anyway, you clearly don't know the latest on that ... that harlot you're so keen on.

Nicodemus Go on.

They huddle together conspiratorially, the row forgotten.

Petronia Well, they say she's ... with child. And that the father is none other than (*with a flourish*) Benitus Maximus.

At that, Benitus enters, in his robes of office.

Benitus Hail! And what is of such interest, I ask?

They break their huddle, cough and look generally suspicious. Benitus looks at them expectantly.

Agostos (*Guiltily*) We were just discussing the ... the ... (*suddenly inspired*) the graffiti! That's it! The graffiti on Stephanus's wall.

The others concur, relieved.

Benitus What graffiti? (*He turns to look at it*) What! What is the meaning of this? Who is this, this 'Octavius', who deigns to stand against me?

Nicodemus That ... that is what we were just discussing.

Benitus Well, presumably he's a coward. Announcing his intentions in this way, instead of coming to talk terms with me. Well perhaps that's just as well. He has every reason to be fearful.

Octavius, who had been watching impassively, spits out an olive pip, drawing attention to himself.

Octavius He doesn't, and he isn't.

Benitus Oh? And who are you, stranger, to give your opinions on the matter so freely?
Octavius I am Octavius.

A market trader who has been watching this scene unfold beckons to the others, and they all enter, eager to see what will happen. Benitus, at first taken aback, regains his composure when he sees a crowd has gathered.

Benitus Pah! A common soldier. What makes you think you can march in here, and start turning things upside down?

Octavius Well, being a soldier is no bad thing. I still have friends in high places. I could pull a few strings, get a garrison set up nearby. That would earn me the blacksmiths' votes. And the brothel owners.

Benitus You vulgar little man. I have been Duumviri for the last few years, and ...

Octavius ... and maybe it's time for a change.

Benitus What do you know of the exercise of power? What do you think gives you the right?

Octavius Well unlike you, a puffed up little man in his ceremonial uniform, *(this raises a gasp, a smirk, and a giggle amongst the onlookers)* I have risked my own life for the glory and defence of this empire. Not only that, I have stained my hands and my conscience with the blood of others. *(Benitus yawns to the crowd)*. I saw things in Jerusalem that made me glad I am single and childless. I would not want those that I loved to share a world where such cruelties were possible.

Benitus And so that makes you fit for power? I think not.

Octavius Well then, what has been your contribution to the glory of the empire?

Nicodemus That's a good point.

There is a murmur of agreement from the crowd.

Benitus My contribution is a little more ... ethereal.

Benitus *(Clearing his throat to attract attention)* I, and those like me, set the standards, that slowly filter down to the rest. We represent the civilisation, the culture, that you sought to defend. Without individuals of greatness there is nothing, no benchmark. But then you probably wouldn't understand much about that ... being an outsider.

This causes a murmur in the crowd.

Octavius What is meant by that, friend?

Benitus Well, look at your complexion. You are not one of us, a proper Roman.

Octavius I have a bronze tablet, given in exchange for twenty-five years loyal service, which says that I am.

Benitus By birth, you are little more than a barbarian.

There is a gasp in the crowd.

Music #4 - 'Partly Political Broadcast'

Benitus *Calm down now! Don't show your hand* [Talking to himself]
In front of these plebs one must be bland.
But how dare he? The common upstart,
Interfering playing out my part
This scum of lowly birth I'd not foresee.
Good People, don't misunderstand me. [To crowd]
I have respect for all who are free.
But leadership is best left to my class,
Men like him will make it all a farce
Because I'm your man, I'm sure you all agree.

Crowd *Well I think he's right, and he's got a case,* }
And he knows his stuff and we know our place. }
Which one do we like? Which one do we hate? }
Who will serve us best as a magistrate? }
In a town like this people need a voice }
And that soldier man should be our choice } Chorus
Will he the best? It's so hard to know. }
Do we want to keep the status quo? }
Well I think he's right, and he's got a case, }
And he knows his stuff and we know our place. }

Which one do we like? Which one do we hate? |
Who will serve us best as a magistrate?]

Octavius Good people, all who are free
Don't fear the old aristocracy
We are the new, we are the now,
Isn't it time that we learned how
To enjoy this land of milk and honey? [Now as an aside]
For too long now he has had his own way
Acting as if he is Lord of Pompeii
But he's not as smart as he likes to think,
He's captain of a ship about to sink.
Benitus, I'm only here for your money

Crowd [Repeat Chorus, then ...]
Lucky to live in democracy,
I'd better decide what's best for me
I must get my share, I must have more,
The rich get richer and the poor stay poor.
Lucky to live in democracy,
I'd better decide what's best for me
I must get my share, I must have more,
The rich get richer and the poor stay poor.

Octavius	Benitus	Crowd
Good people, All who are free Don't fear the old Aristocracy We are the new, We are the now, It's time that We learned how. Good people, All who are free Don't fear the old Aristocracy	Good People, don't misunderstand me. I have respect for all who are free. But leadership is best left to my class, Men like him will make it all a farce Good People, don't misunderstand me. I have respect for all who are free. But leadership is best left to my class, Men like him will make it all a farce Good People, don't misunderstand me. I have respect for all who are free. But leadership is best left to my class, Men like him will make it all a farce	Well I think he's right, and he's got a case, And he knows his stuff and we know our place. Which one do we like? Which one do we hate? Who will serve us best as a magistrate? In a town like this people need a voice And that soldier man could be our choice Will he the best? It's so hard to know. Do we want to keep the status quo? Well I think he's right, and he's got a case, And he knows his stuff and we know our place. Which one do we like? Which one do we hate? Who will serve us best as a magistrate?
All	Vote for me! Vote for me! Vote for me in the Magistracy!'	

Octavius and Benitus continue to circle each other.

Octavius You know, my friend, this whole town, in fact this whole empire, benefits from the diversity of its people. Inclusiveness is one of the things that makes it so great.

The crowd approve of this. Benitus clenches his fists in rage at having evidently overstepped the mark.

Benitus *(Laughing with false good humour)* You have a sharp mind my friend. Come, perhaps we should discuss our policies more amicably over a glass of wine. *(The crowd seem disappointed that the show is over, as Benitus takes Octavius to one side).* Quite a performance. But I would recommend leaving town before the election. While you're still alive.

Octavius Really? Well maybe I will meet my death here, but not by your hand. Look at these scars, do you think I got them building roads? I have seen death in its many guises, and as such I am a dangerous man to threaten.

Benitus backs off looking worried. At that moment Claudius and Marcella enter. Claudius is ranting.

Claudius If I could just get my hands on them!

Marcella Calm yourself down. You're making a scene.

Claudius But do you know how much it's going to cost to get it all put right?

Benitus allows himself a sly smile, then goes to Claudius.

Benitus Claudius, my friend, what troubles you?
Claudius Wouldn't you like to know.
Marcella *(To Benitus)* It's our shop and warehouse. Someone's broken in and turned it upside down.
Benitus *(Insincere)* Oh my dear, that's terrible. So mindless. I feel for you, I really do. *(To crowd, seizing his opportunity)* Mind you, a vote for me as Magistrate will help. I propose to get tougher on crime. *(Indicating Octavius)* An influx of out-of-towners seems to be responsible for the current surge. Well, be assured, when I'm re-elected law and order will be my top priority.
Quinta And what about stray dogs?
Benitus Well, I assure you ...

They are interrupted by shouting off stage, as Decimus, the old man enters.

Decimus Doom! It's coming! Feel its approach!
Benitus Shut up, you foolish old man!
Decimus Mock me, would you? I've seen the signs! We can all see the signs!
Massima What signs, old man?
Decimus On the slopes of Vesuvius, the streams have dried up. The earth beneath our feet rumbles daily. The Gods are showing their displeasure!
Pietra I did hear about that.
Lucretia You don't believe him do you?
Decimus You will believe me. You will all believe me!

The crowd grumble, clearly used to this act, and disperse.

Agostos Why do they do that?
Nicodemus What?
Agostos Prophesise doom and destruction. I mean, what's the satisfaction in getting it right?

Lights down.

Scene 5 - The Forum, Outside The Olive Bar. August 23rd.

Various characters go about their business. Stephanus and Maria are trying to scrub the graffiti from the wall. Ceia enters with a basket, head bowed, anxious to carry out her chores. Helvius is waiting for her.

Helvius Ceia! Ceia! Over here! *(She ignores him, and keeps her head down).* Ceia, are you ignoring me? *(He goes to her, and recoils when he sees her black eye and bruising).* Did she do that to you?
Ceia Helvius, leave me. If she finds I have stopped to talk to you there will be terrible retribution.
Helvius Oh, I'll see about retribution.
Ceia Helvius, don't talk that way. You know what they do to slaves who make trouble.
Helvius I don't care what happens to me, if it stops them from hurting you.
Ceia Hush, patience. If we just bide our time we will be free and together. We have our future now to look forward to.

Enter the slave chorus.

Music #5 - 'The Freedom Song'

Slaves You see - what I'm told I may see
You walk - with my head bowed low
You breathe - I'm gasping for air
You love - and love is all I have to give ...
Ceia What is this thing they call freedom?
What is this thing they call choice?
How would you know if I had them?
Would it show in my eyes or my voice?
Well I feel so broken and useless -
why even the moon's allowed to shine.
If it's true what they say that each dog has its day,
How long until I can have mine?

Slaves *You see - what I'm told I may see
You walk - with my head bowed low
You breathe - I'm gasping for air
You love - and love is all I have to give ...*

Helvius *What is this thing they call freedom?
Can a bird escape from the sky?
The rich man is chained to ambition -
He's no freer than you are or I.
We are all much more than the sum of our parts
Even though we're just part of a sum.
And although they abuse you; scare and confuse you,
Your heart beats to a different drum.'*

Chorus *You see - yes I see what you mean
You walk - in the shade of your love
You breathe - the same air as a king
You love - and you have taught me how to love.
And as time goes by and the plot unfolds,
You think you're too young to be this old.
You're better alive than you would be dead
'Cos they cannot change what's inside your head
And as time goes by and the plot unfolds,
You think you're too young to be this old.
You're better alive than you would be dead
'Cos they cannot change what's inside your head*

Helvius *And if we feel that our lives are in chains,
Constrained by the ties that bind
Well they can shackle our bodies
But they cannot shackle our minds.*

Chorus *Life is good, life is sweet,
Flows like waves rippling under your feet
Life is good, life is sweet,
Like the waves rippling under your feet
Life is good, life is sweet,
Flows like waves rippling under your feet
Life is good, life is sweet,
Flows like waves rippling under your feet*

Exit slave chorus. Ceia and Helvius hold hands.

Ceia Later.

She leaves and Helvius departs in the opposite direction. The market traders enter.

Pietra *(To Dometria) And you should have seen Benitus' face.*

Paola He's not used to being challenged like that.

Dometria So he's a serious candidate, this Octavius?

Lucretia He certainly sounded so.

Quinta Who's backing him, I wonder?

Paola And what are his policies?

Massima Well here he comes, why don't we ask him?

Octavius enters, and the traders surround him noisily, bombarding him with questions, and congratulating him on his performance against Benitus. Octavius is looking round for Hercules.

Octavius *(Distracted) What?*

Quinta Where do you stand on stray dogs?

The others groan. Octavius shrugs, disinterested.

Massima Well what about crime?

Octavius What about it?
Dometria Who are you representing?

Octavius looks confused.

Pietra Who's backing you?
Paola The bronzesmiths? The ironmongers?
Lucretia The launderers and fullers?

Octavius continues to shrug.

Massima The bar and innkeepers?
Octavius Look, go away. Leave me alone. I'm waiting to meet someone.

There is a brief stunned silence as they stare at him. He gestures them away, and they move off in a group. Hercules enters and lurks shiftily on the other side of the stage.

Dometria *(Whispered)* Well, fancy that.
Quinta He lacks the charm of Benitus.
Massima I know. And I never thought I'd find myself saying that about someone.

The traders rush off. Hercules, seeing the stage is clear, sidles over to Octavius.

Octavius *(Annoyed)* Great idea of yours that was. These people think I'm serious.
Herculus Relax. It won't be for much longer. His election fund is now in the house safe.
Octavius Well what are we waiting for? Let's go there now.
Herculus Patience my impetuous friend. We need a little time to be sure we have covered our tracks. Benitus has powerful friends.
Octavius Which is why we should be in, out and gone.
Herculus Tomorrow is the 24th. The house will be empty in the evening. We empty the safe then. At eight o'clock. Here. *(He hands Octavius a key).*
Octavius Is this the safe key?
Herculus Hardly. I'll be holding on to that. It's the key to the double doors. You'll need to bring your horse inside. We will be dealing with a heavy load.
Octavius *(Grinning)* Now that is music to my ears. I'll look forward to seeing you tomorrow at eight. Oh, and remember, no changing the plan.

Herculus gives a mock bow, as Octavius leaves. Benitus marches in from the other side, looking angry. Hercules looks momentarily worried.

Benitus What is going on? What do you think you're doing dealing with him?
Herculus Master, I, er ... I was trying to solve our little problem.
Benitus How?
Herculus *(Regaining his composure)* Well Master, I was offering to pay him to leave town.
Benitus And?
Herculus *(Grinning slyly)* I'm afraid he wasn't interested. I think we might have to try something more 'persuasive'.
Benitus What's the matter with him, isn't he interested in money? Shall we get some local thugs to run him out of town?
Herculus You've seen his scars. I don't think he'll scare easily. It might be prudent to arrange something more ... permanent.
Benitus *(Looking around, he whispers)* Have him killed you mean?
Herculus Why not Master? I've arranged it for you before.
Benitus I know, but this is an election year.
Herculus Well Master, as before, once he's dealt with, we ... I mean you, can sentence the killers to the games. Tie up the loose ends.
Benitus And send out a message about my crime policy.
Herculus And provide some entertainment for the games Master, which will save on your gladiator expenses.
Benitus *(Grinning)* You are a piece of work, my friend. Very well, arrange it.

Herculus I would urge for it to be done as soon as possible, Master. It would be good if he were out of our hair by say ... tomorrow evening?

Benitus I leave the arrangements in your hands Herculus.

Herculus leaves, as the market traders re-enter. Julia enters from the other side, along with the two dogs who watch the unfolding scene.

Lucretia Look, there's Benitus.

Paola Should we be seen to support him again?

Pietra We ought to back the winner.

Dometria Let's not worry about it now. We have plenty of time to make up our minds.

Enter Decimus.

Decimus Doom! Can you feel the end approaching? Its merciless grasp?

The crowd groan and depart to avoid him. Julia takes the opportunity to approach.

Julia Benitus, I know you told me not to come to you in public, but it feels like so long now since we have been together.

Benitus *(Looking around)* Go away! Are you trying to ruin me?

Julia I just need some reassurance of our plans. For our future.

Benitus If you bother me in public again, you will have no future.

She grabs him desperately.

Julia Benitus darling, I know you don't mean that.

Benitus Unhand me! You have no idea what I am capable of.

Julia runs, crying. The dogs stand.

Male Dog Such double dealing! You know, I'm starting to wonder why I love this town. The lies come so easily. And they all treat each other with such contempt.

Female Dog Not all of them. My family are good and kind.

Death enters, and passes through, eyeing up various characters who are oblivious to its presence. Octavius enters from the other side. As Death passes the dogs they growl. Death acknowledges them with a smile. Octavius also follows Death with his gaze, as if he recognises it. Lights down.

Music #6 - 'Pressure Rising'

[The entire chorus are on stage for this. At the start, the majority of them are Hard Corps, but during the song, they all gradually migrate to become Lava Louts].

Hard Corps Got to keep the lid on, cover that crack
Calm's what's needed: cool it at the back!
Sleeping for a hundred years - go back to sleep once more
Cool down, simmer down and go back to the core
Quiescence!

Lava Louts Pressure, Pressure
Hot, hot and hotter still, push and shove
Time's right to see what it's like above
Don't listen to the hard corps trying to spoil our fun
Gaudiamus igitur - rejoice while we are young
Eruption!

Hard Corps Calm down the fires, harness that power
Over the far side you're dead within an hour
Forces are too deadly; they'll finish what you start.
Calm down, simmer down, cool the raging heart
Quiescence!

Lava Louts It's a new order, the hard corps's old and ashen
At the top for so long, lost all the passion
We're hot and in ascendance, their hold on us decreased!

*Just push a little harder and we shall be released
Eruption!*

All *Aaah, oooh etc*

Lava Louts *Pressure rising, Pressure rising
Earth is gaping, no escaping! Pressure rising, Pressure rising*

Hard Corps *Calm down, simmer down cool the rage inside
Calm down, simmer down, let it all subside
You know what it means, if you see this through
Calm down, simmer down, see our point of view
Over on the far side it's dead and it's black*

Lava Louts *It must be better there 'cos they never come back!*

Hard Corps *Cool down! Simmer down! There's still time to stop*

Lava Louts *Stand aside 'cos we're going over the top!
Eruption!!'*

Exit cast. Lights down.

END OF ACT ONE

INTERVAL

ACT TWO

Scene 1 - The Forum, Outside The Olive Bar

Enter market traders.

Music #7 - 'Time Moves On'

Soloist *Remember yesterday, and the heat of the sun?
The gods were smiling and our day had just begun.
Only happiness, no regrets and no sorrow
Living life as if there's no tomorrow.
Time marches on, things may not be constant
Everything must change, things may not be constant.
Things may not be constant,
Things may not be constant.
Then as if ushered by celestial hand
A deadly calm fell upon the land.*

Exit traders. Lights down.

Scene 2 - The Home Of Benitus. August 24th

Benitus enters, yawning. Valeria enters from the other side.

Valeria Good morning Benitus.

Benitus *(Looking at her suspiciously).* What are you after?

Valeria Nothing. I'm just curious ... about what you're up to at the moment.

Benitus And why should I be 'up' to anything?

Valeria Because I've seen you plotting with that secretary of yours, Hercules. And I saw him last night plotting with some men from the gladiator school.

Benitus It's nothing.

Valeria Really, Benitus darling, you're not bright enough to go making plans of your own. You should leave the thinking to me. Otherwise it will end in tears.

Benitus Oh, you think so? Well maybe you're right, but they won't be my tears.

Valeria So you're not going to tell me?

Benitus There's nothing to tell.
Valeria Have it your own way. Hmmm, they're so impressive aren't they, those gladiators? Such powerful, muscular men. Maybe I'll get one for myself.

Julia enters, and unseen goes to the vantage point that Helvius used earlier.

Benitus Why do you goad me so, Valeria? Do you want me to 'assert' myself?

Valeria Well, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Benitus Meaning?

Valeria Well you and your carrying on with that hussy Julia.

Involuntarily, Julia gasps from her vantage point, but neither Valeria or Benitus hear.

Valeria That little situation is going to need 'dealing with' soon.

Benitus *(Taken aback)* You ... you know? About Julia?

Valeria *(Laughing)* Of course I know. You're not exactly subtle. But her condition could lead to things getting messy and expensive in an election year. *(With steely resolve)* And though I may be only a woman, you would not believe the trouble I could make for you.

Benitus *(Leaning in, threatening)* You know, my friend Hercules and I have discovered a very good way of dealing with people who make trouble for me. So you know about Julia. So what? She's a short-term problem, but I'll deal with her in my time and my way. Not because you've told me to.

Valeria I am your wife.

Benitus Then perhaps you should have behaved as such. I will do as I please.

Valeria You should be careful how you treat me, Benitus. I'm no fool.

Benitus No, you should be careful. Believe me, in the game of politics, money talks much more than a wife. Just don't outlive your usefulness to me.

Benitus goes to leave as Ceia enters, carrying washing to be taken to the fullers. As he goes past he notices her black eye.

Benitus *(To Ceia)* What have you done to your face, girl? *(Ceia stares at the floor).* Such a pretty face. You should be careful.

He smiles gloatingly at Valeria, then leaves. As Ceia walks past, Valeria stops her.

Valeria Proud of yourself, are you girl?

Ceia I'm just taking these to the fullers.

Valeria You know what you're doing. Playing up to my husband.

Ceia Please, I ...

Valeria slaps her.

Valeria Go on, get out of my sight.

Valeria shoves her and Ceia falls to the floor, dropping the washing.

Ceia Ow!

Valeria Pick that up!

Ceia *(Feeling her leg)* My ankle! I think it's broken!

Valeria Broken! Stop skiving, pick those up and get to the fullers.

Exit Valeria. Ceia collects the washing, and tries to stand, but falls again. The ankle is broken. Meanwhile Octavius enters and sneaks up behind Julia in her hiding place. He puts his hand over her mouth, startling her.

Octavius Shhh! Now when I take my hand away, I want to know who you are, and what you're doing skulking around up here.

He slowly removes his hand.

Julia My name is Julia. I'm here to see Benitus. And I could ask you the same question.

Octavius I have a meeting with his secretary, Hercules, which I'm hoping to bring forward.

Julia Then why are you 'skulking' up here?

Octavius *(Smiling)* Well perhaps we both have good reason for not entering via the atrium, and announcing ourselves.

Julia And what would you know?

Octavius A hunch. Well I won't say anything if you won't. *(He peers into the room. Then, to himself).* Come on, Hercules, where are you hiding yourself?

Julia *(To herself)* Come on, Benitus, where are you?

Octavius *(To Julia)* It's none of my business, but do you have feelings for him?

Julia It's none of your business, but I love him.

Octavius Hah! It has to be the money, right? But if that's all you're in it for, you may want to think again. I don't know that he's a good long-term investment.

Julia I would feel the same for him if he were penniless. Love doesn't have a price.

Octavius Then I fear you don't know Benitus.

Julia It is you who doesn't know him.

Octavius *(Shaking his head)* You poor girl. Still, I suppose we all have our cross to bear.

Exit Octavius, as Valeria re-enters.

Music #8 - 'The Cross I Have To Bear'

Valeria *Can you see me? I'm invisible.
Just a figment of a man's imagination.
Can you hear me? I'm so miserable.
With status that is way below my station.
I'm chained to this life and I'm chained to this man
And I'm doing the best that I can.
But because woman is my name
Locked within this fragile frame
Life is a cross I have to bear.'*

Julia *I'm so pale from standing in the shadows,
When will the sun shine on me?
Always made to feel so bad, though,
It's not my fault I am not free.
Oh I need the break, need the love of one man
And I'm doing the best that I can.
If he were struck by Cupid's dart
It would mean a brand new start
But till then love is the cross I have to bear.*

Valeria *Lost property, I don't belong here
Just a commodity that should be traded,
Will my time come, is the way clear?
Before my mind goes and my looks have faded.
But while I'm living under his roof,
I'm suffocating, I'm gasping for air,
Better believe me, 'cos I'm telling the truth
Life is the cross I have to bear.*

[Instrumental]

Valeria	<i>I am his puppet, he is the master Life is a cross I have to bear. Born a woman, what a disaster Life is the cross I have to bear.</i>	Julia	<i>Life is the cross I have to bear, I know I can love him without strings. Life is the cross I have to bear Give him all the joy that true love brings</i>
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Valeria *I could poison his food like he poisons my mind*

Julia *I'd be his wife and his troubles I'd share.*

Both *But till then my life's a sham
Just because of who I am*

Valeria	<i>And life is a cross I have to bear.</i>	Julia	<i>But till then love is the cross I have to bear.</i>
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Exit Valeria and Julia. Lights down.

Scene 3 - The Merchant's House. August 24th

Helvius is carrying the luggage of Claudia and Jana towards a carriage, as they follow. Claudius and Marcella enter from the other side. The whole scene is watched by Iris, the female dog.

Claudius Come on, hurry up. It's a long enough journey to Rome as it is.

Marcella *(To the girls)* Have you got everything you need?

Helvius *(Struggling)* I cannot imagine a scenario where they haven't.

Claudia Is there no way we can take Iris with us?

Claudius Absolutely not. I am not sharing a carriage with that dog.

The girls go and pet Iris.

Marcella *(To Helvius)* You have everything you need for the next few days?

Helvius *(Smiling)* Since you told me about my freedom, I have everything I need for the next few years. *(To Claudius, indicating luggage)* Do you know where these are going yet, sir?

Claudius Yes, bring them this way, boy. And hurry up you lot.

Claudius and Helvius leave, Helvius struggling with the luggage.

Marcella *(to children)* Say your goodbyes and come on.

Exit Marcella. The girls continue to pet Iris, then lead her to the other side and tether her down, as Helvius re-enters.

Helvius Come on hurry up, your father's getting impatient.

Jana Nearly done.

Helvius Iris doesn't need tying up, why are you doing that?

Claudia Well, we don't want her to run away.

Helvius *(Indicating the tag on his wrist)* Hmm. The same reason I have to wear this, "If found, return to Claudius Valens for reward".

Jana But we love Iris.

Helvius But you won't let her be free.

Claudia I know what you're getting at. But we treat Iris well. As you have been treated.

Helvius I know. I'm one of the lucky ones. But nothing beats freedom.

Enter Claudius.

Claudius Come on, you two, now!

Jana *(Patting Iris)* See you soon.

Claudia *(Patting Iris)* Love you girl.

The girls rush off, waving goodbye to Helvius.

Helvius *(To Iris)* Not the same as your freedom though, is it girl?

Iris strains at her leash, and barks. Exit Helvius.

Scene 4 - The Forum, Outside The Olive Bar. August 24th

Various traders go about their business, albeit in a slightly subdued manner, as Claudius and his family pass through in their carriage. The male dog is watching proceedings. Death enters from the side, and as the scene develops, goes slowly across the stage, scrutinising various people, unseen by them. Claudius's family in the carriage are ignored.

Jana I feel sick.

Marcella Shh!

Claudia I feel strange as well. Is it carriage sickness?

Marcella Don't annoy your father.

Claudius No, there's something. An oppressive feeling. Something's not right.

Stephanus emerges from the olive bar.

Stephanus Hail Claudius. *(Claudius waves back)*. Enjoy your trip to Rome. *(He stops and rubs his head. Then, tp himself)* I wish I were going somewhere like Rome.

Claudius *(To his family)* I think we have picked a good time to be leaving town. Don't ask me why.

Maria *(Shaking Stephanus)* Come on, what is it with you today? We have so much to do.

She gets on with her work, as Stephanus spots the male dog, and throws him an olive.

Stephanus There you go, boy.

The dog sniffs at it, but ignores it. Stephanus looks hurt. The male dog stands up.

Male Dog I don't know what's the matter with me today. I've completely lost my appetite. There's a buzzing, throbbing in my head that's stopping me thinking about anything else. *(He sees Death)*. Hang on, what's that doing here?

Death *(It turns and looks at the male dog, then raises a finger to its lips)* Shhh!

The male dog drops on to four legs, and starts furiously barking at Death.

Massima What's got into that crazy dog?

Lucretia Something's upset him.

Paola He's barking at nothing.

Quinta Well, so long as he's away from my stall I don't really care.

Pietra *(Rubbing her head)* I wish I could concentrate on something other than this headache.

Dometria *(Also rubbing head)* You as well? I thought it was only me.

There is a murmur of assent among the other traders. Nicodemus and Agostos enter and approach Decimus, who uncharacteristically is sitting pensively watching the volcano.

Agostos What is it old man? Why are you not your usual cheery self?

Nicodemus Aye, what ails you?

Decimus *(Looking up)* Such terrible dreams. Unspeakable terrors. And now there is nothing more I can do.

Agostos Ah, that's more like it.

Nicodemus The Decimus we know and love.

Sniggering they walk on, as Decimus goes back to his musing. Death checks a timepiece, as the others freeze.

Death *(Sighing)* It's time.

A refrain from 'Pressure Rising' starts, and the loud rumble of the volcano fills the air. The eruption has begun. Spotlights show the mimed reactions of the various characters, one at a time. Lights down. Benitus, Valeria, Octavius and Julia are stage left; the market traders, customers and Claudius' family are centre stage. Helvius, Ceia and Iris are stage right. The lights come up centre stage, where there is general panic and confusion.

Paola What was that?

Quinta The ground is shaking ... an earthquake?

Lucretia *(Pointing)* Look, it's Vesuvius! Something's happening with Vesuvius!

Dometria Look how the smoke and flames rise! Pluto is rising from the underworld!

Massima We've angered the Gods! They're unleashing their fury on us!

Pietra We'll all be consumed!

Lights down on centre stage, up on stage left. Enter Benitus and Valeria.

Benitus What was that? *(Another rumble, Benitus and Valeria are thrown together. They push each other away)*. A little late for that, isn't it, 'my dear'?

Valeria Not if you were the last man on Earth! *(Another rumble. They look in the direction of Vesuvius)*. We need to get out of here! But what shall I take?

Benitus *(Starting to panic)* Hercules! Where are you? *(He exits)*.

Lights down on stage left, up on centre stage.

Decimus *(To all and sundry)* I told you! I warned you! All of you! Now what do you say? Now do you believe Decimus? Hah! *(He looks at the rising cloud, in terror)* Dear Juno, it's terrible!

Maria *(To Stephanus)* What shall we do? Stephanus, what shall we do?

Stephanus stares, unable to move. Lights down on centre stage, up on stage left. Enter Hercules.

Benitus *(Off stage)* Hercules! Damn you!

Herculus *(Cringing)* Oh no! Oh no! I must flee! I must escape! But wait, what about the money?

Herculus removes the safe key from around his neck and stares at it. Lights down on stage left, up on stage right. Enter Iris, attached to a tether. She barks wildly, then stands up on two legs.

Female Dog He was right! Something is wrong here. *(She gnaws at her tether)* I need to get out and see.

Lights down on stage right, up on stage centre.

Jana Father!

Claudia Father, we're scared!

Marcella Claudius?

Claudius *(Momentarily mesmerised, then snaps out of it)* I know, I know. Driver, speed up. Let's get out of here.

Lights down on centre stage, up on stage left. Enter Octavius. A horse is heard offstage, over the rumbling.

Octavius Calm, girl, calm. We have a job to do, then we'll be free. Your speed can get us to safety. *(He looks up at the spreading cloud. Then, to himself)* I pray.

Lights down on stage left, up on stage right. Enter Helvius, staring at the volcano.

Helvius I don't understand! Strabo said it was extinct! It had to be extinct! How can this be happening?

Lights down on stage right, up on stage left. Enter Julia, looking round frantically.

Julia Benitus, where are you? *(Holding her stomach)* Surely you'll come to protect us? We need you!

Lights down on stage left, up on stage centre. Hot pumice starts to fall.

Nicodemus Ahh, what's that?

Agostos Ahh, it burns!

Nicodemus The sky is coming down on us!

Lights down on stage centre, up on stage left. Ceia is on the floor nursing her broken ankle.

Valeria *(Off stage)* Ceia! Get here girl! And bring my jewellery!

Ceia *(Looks skyward)* What have we done? What have we done? *(Tries, but fails to stand up)* Ow!

Lights down on stage left, up on stage centre. Stephanus is hit by falling pumice and comes out of his trance.

Stephanus Ow! Quick, Maria, get inside, take cover!

All round people look to the skies, and start to take cover.

Music #9 - 'The Sky Falls Down'

Soloist *Burning ashes. Lightning flashes.
The air is hot and heavy and grey.
Panic stricken. Pulses quicken
Suffocating night has replaced the day.
Where you gonna run to? Where you gonna hide?
Gods are against you, not on your side.
It's a rain of terror; it's a wind of change,
and the sun disappears and the sky falls down, ah!*

Chorus *Now's a good time to get out of town,
So you'd better keep going and never slow down
Now's a good time to get out of town
because the sky's come tumbling down.
Now's a good time to get out of town,
So you'd better keep going and never slow down
Now's a good time to get out of town
because the sky's come tumbling down.*

Soloist *Bones are shaking. Earth is quaking.
You gotta get out or be buried alive.
Fires are blazing. Hearts are racing.
How are you ever gonna survive?
Better find your loved ones, kiss them goodbye.
No-one's gonna live and we're all gonna die*

*It's the wrath of God, it's a demon's delight
It's the end of our days and eternal night, ah!*
Chorus *And it's no good swimming, 'cos we're all gonna drown
So you'd better get running and never slow down.
Now's a good time to get out of town,
Because the sky's come tumbling down.
And it's no good swimming, 'cos we're all gonna drown
So you'd better get running and never slow down.
Now's a good time to get out of town,
Because the sky's come tumbling down.*

[Instrumental]

Soloist *What's now a roar started with a murmur,
There is far too much terror and not enough firma
It's a bad situation and no-one's gonna win,
Things are looking grave, so you might as well jump in.*

[Instrumental]

Soloist *Hearts are breaking, skin is flaking
Rocks and stones are dropping like rain
Titanic crashes. Ashes to ashes.
No way out, it's gonna end in pain
Where you gonna run to? Where you gonna hide?
Gods are all against you, none on your side.
It's a rain of terror, it's a wind of change
And the sun disappears and the sky falls down*

Chorus *It's the end of our people, it's the end of our town,
Where can you run when the sky comes down?
No good swimming cos we're all gonna drown
And the sky comes tumbling down!
It's the end of our people, it's the end of our town,
Where can you run when the sky comes down?
No good swimming cos we're all gonna drown
And the sky comes tumbling down.*

[Instrumental]

Lights down.

Scene 5 - The Home Of Benitus. August 24th

Herculus is revealed staring at the safe key. A new, loud rumbling startles him.

Herculus *(To himself)* Okay, think, think. This can work to my advantage. If I do this right, I can get away with the money and my life.

Benitus *(Off stage)* Herculus!

Herculus And they'll never trace me.

Benitus *(Off stage)* Show yourself!

Herculus puts the key back in his pocket.

Herculus I think not, master.

Herculus hides, as Benitus enters, frantically looking for him, followed by Valeria.

Benitus Herculus!

Valeria Look forget him. Under the circumstances we're just going to have to pack up for ourselves. We need to hurry.

Benitus You stupid woman! Herculus has the key! To the safe! Where all my funds for the election are!

Valeria I somehow doubt there's going to be an election now. I doubt very much there will even be a Pompeii. Which is why we need to move out now.

Benitus You don't get it do you? The sympathy card of being a Pompeiian is my ticket into the senate. But sympathy alone won't cut it. I need my cash.

Valeria Only you could see this as an opportunity. You and your money!

Benitus Which you're happy enough to spend! Do you understand, this is everything. When we get out of here, we'll have nothing without it!

Valeria But the accounts? In Rome?

Benitus Emptied and brought here for the election!

Valeria You idiot! Hercules! *(Now joins the searching for him)* Damn you!

Benitus *(Goes to the safe and starts yanking on the door).* Why did I entrust the key to him? Why was I so stupid?

Ceia hobbles in.

Ceia Have you seen outside? The sky is completely black, we all need to get out of here!

Valeria *(To Benitus)* That's it. I'm going to the carriage, and I'm out of here.

Benitus No-one's going anywhere until I've got my money! *(To himself)* Right, he must have gone out. Now think, where? Where?

Benitus marches off stage, still shouting for Hercules.

Valeria And you, I don't want you going anywhere.

Ceia What?

Valeria I want someone here to look after the house, in case of looting.

Valeria marches off stage. Ceia goes to follow her, but her ankle is too painful and she sits down.

Ceia *(To the retreating Valeria)* Damn you! *(To herself)* I can't even run for it. Oh Helvius, I hope you're somewhere safe.

Ceia crawls offstage, as Hercules emerges from his hiding place and rushes to the safe. With fumbling hands, he uses the key, but he is disturbed by voices off stage and goes back into hiding. Octavius enters, leading Julia with him.

Octavius You've seen what it's like out there. You need to get out of here, while you still can.

Julia I'm not going anywhere without my beloved.

Octavius The Maximus's have a carriage. Find the wife and go with her. Save yourself.

Julia I need to see Benitus. With love comes loyalty ... surely you as a soldier should understand that?

Julia rushes off stage, calling for Benitus. A horse is heard off-stage.

Octavius *(To the off stage horse)* I know girl. We'll be off soon. *(Ostentatiously)* I guess we'll have to look for him at the forum.

The horse neighs again as Octavius leaves the stage. Once the coast is clear, Hercules furtively emerges and goes back to the safe. He opens the safe and starts unloading large bags of money.

Herculus Oh yes.

Unseen by Hercules, Octavius sneaks back on and approaches him. He clears his throat, startling Hercules.

Octavius Well, well. Another change of plan, I see.

Herculus *(Leaping to feet, flustered)* No, no, of course not. I ... I just didn't know what was going on, w- what with ... all this. But of course I was going to try and find you and give you your share.

Octavius Any man with any sense would be on the road out of town by now. But you just couldn't leave the money, could you? At least I can rely on you for something.

Herculus Well, I can't help but notice that you're still around.

Octavius True. But maybe I have another motive for sticking around. Revenge, say. On the man who had set me up to be killed, assassinated on this day, while he made off with my share of the loot.

Herculus How ... how did you know?

Octavius You just told me.

Octavius draws his sword, as Hercules cringes on his knees.

Herculus Oh no, oh please. Let's just forget all that now, and get out of here.
Octavius (*Pointing the sword towards him*). You're going nowhere ...

Lights down.

Scene 6 - The Forum, Outside The Olive Bar. August 24th

Flashing lights and rumbling sounds add to a scene of chaos, as various characters run back and forth across the stage. In the midst of this, Decimus becomes highlighted, staring at the volcano, transfixed. Paola, arms full of possessions, collides with him.

Paola Ow! Come on, old man, what are you doing? Save yourself!
Decimus (*Trancelike*) So awesome...

Massima and Quinta enter, arms full.

Massima (*Grabbing Paola*) Leave him, come on!

Quinta spots the male dog, barking.

Quinta (*Indicating a market stall off stage*) Go on - it's all yours now.
Male Dog (*Standing up on two legs*) Where is Iris? We need to be away from here, something must be wrong.

Stephanus emerges from the olive bar, a box in his hands, followed by Maria.

Maria Leave that, we need to go now! (*Pointing at the volcano*) Look!
Stephanus I'm not leaving all this stock out. (*Indicating the others!*) Look, they're all packing up. I just need to put it in the store.
Maria (*Panicked*) Stephanus, can you not see?

Julia enters, still frantically searching for Benitus.

Julia Benitus! (*Stopping Dometria*) Have you seen my love, Benitus Maximus?
Dometria Out of my way, you fool!

Julia is shoved to the floor. Helvius enters, sees this and picks her up.

Helvius Are you okay?
Julia Benitus Maximus is not at his home! Have you seen him?
Helvius You've been at the Maximus's? Was Ceia there? Was she okay?
Julia I ... I, don't ...
Helvius (*Shaking her*) Was she there?
Julia Yes, I believe so.
Helvius (*Letting Julia go*) Do yourself a favour. Forget Benitus, and get out of here.

Julia and Helvius leave, in search of their respective lovers. Enter Nicodemus, swigging wine from an amphora, clearly drunk. He collides with a panicking passer-by.

Nicodemus Whoah, calm down. It's not as if it's the end of the world. Ha ha! Or maybe it is ... but either way, what's the point in hurrying and rushing round? Stop and have a drink with me?

The passer-by shrugs him off, as Agostus enters and spots his friend.

Agostos Nicodemus, what are you doing?
Nicodemus Ah, Agostus, my old friend. You'll stop and have a drink with me, won't you?
Agostos Why are you not packing? Why are you not running?
Nicodemus Running where?
Agostos Away from here. Come on, put that down, come with us.
Nicodemus Not running. No point.
Agostos Of course there's a point, come on.
Nicodemus (*Shaking his head*) It's the end of the world. It's the end of the world, so I'm just gonna sit here and enjoy it ...

Nicodemus sits down, swigging from his amphora. Agostus touches him gently on the shoulder.

Agostos Fare you well, my old friend.

Agostus exits, as Nicodemus raises his amphora to the volcano in a mock toast. He slumps down, as Valeria enters in a coach, which is clearly being hampered by the crowds. Valeria leans out.

Valeria Come on, out of the way you plebs! *(The coach stops when it comes to Nicodemus' slumped body).* By Juno driver, what is it now?

Driver There's a man lying in the road.

Valeria Well drive over him then!

Driver Look, this is no good, we're not getting anywhere fast with these crowds.

Valeria Drive over him. That's an order!

Driver I'm sorry, I'm going on foot. I'm sorry!

He leaves the coach, and runs from the stage, as Benitus enters from the other side, still shouting for Hercules.

Valeria Get back here, you! You!

Benitus *(Seeing Valeria, he goes to the coach).* Well, my dear, it looks as though you've taken my carriage, against my express instructions!

Valeria I'm not just waiting around to die, like you.

Benitus Well, you're not travelling very fast.

Valeria We'll see about that. *(To a passer-by)* You there! Drive this coach, we'll escape together. *(The passer-by ignores her).* I've money! I'll pay you! Anything you like! *(To other passers-by).* You! What about you? *(All ignore her, as they make their own escape).*

Benitus All gone. Looks like you might be walking after all.

Valeria With the common herd? Never.

She retreats inside the carriage, her arms folded.

Benitus Then I'll see you in Hades.

Lights down. The lights come back up on Claudius and his family in their carriage. They are looking backwards.

Marcella Is that screaming I can hear?

Claudius *(Shuddering)* By the Gods, we chose the right time to leave. I just pray the rest of the town's folk are getting out.

Claudia *(Gasps)* Iris! *(To Jana)* We left Iris tied! She won't be able to get away!

Jana We must go back!

Claudius Have you seen what's happening? Absolutely not.

Claudia We can't leave her!

Claudius Look, we're safe. Be thankful for that.

Claudia jumps down from the carriage.

Claudia I'm not leaving her!

Jana joins her.

Jana Me neither.

Marcella Girls, what are you doing?

Claudius Get back in the carriage! Now!

Claudia and Jana exit. Marcella climbs out of the carriage.

Marcella I'm going after them.

Claudius Have you all gone mad? Get back in the carriage.

Marcella Girls, wait!

She exits after them.

Claudius I absolutely forbid this! *(Rubbing his head).* Oh no. *(He climbs down).* Wait for me!

Exit Claudius. Lights down.

Scene 7 - The Home Of Benitus. August 24th

Herculus is visible, struggling with a heavy bag of money. A horse's whinny is heard off stage.

Octavius *(Off stage)* Easy girl, we're nearly done. *(He enters. Then, to Herculus)* Come on speed it up there, make yourself useful. I need some reason to let you live.

Herculus *(Struggling, breathless)* It's so heavy. I really think ... *(A rumble interrupts them).*

Octavius Don't think - just load.

He lifts his sword menacingly. A new louder boom sounds, shaking the scenery, and causing some to collapse.

Herculus The buildings are falling!

Octavius I'll check it out - you carry on loading that money, or I'll kill you before they fall.

Octavius leaves. Herculus drops the money bag.

Herculus That's what you think, you madman, I'm out of here. *(He runs to the edge of the stage, straight into the waiting arms of Death).* Get out of my way, we must flee!

Death *(Gently)* I am afraid you are not going anywhere, my friend.

A sound of crashing masonry is heard, as part of the wall caves in.

Herculus What do you mean? Hurry you fool, move!

Enter Dometria, choking and coughing.

Death *(To Herculus)* Do excuse me, I'll be right back. Don't go anywhere.

Herculus What? *(As Death walks over to Dometria, he struggles to move but is unable to).* I can't move? I can't move! *(As Dometria collapses, Death holds her up, and whispers something gently to her. Dometria looks confused, then nods slowly, in understanding. Death points across the stage, and Dometria nods again, before slowly trudging, head down, in the direction Death had indicated. Death returns to the still straining Herculus).* What's going on? Why can't I move?

Death Can you not see? *(Pointing to the caved in wall).* That's you, or rather your body, trapped under that collapsed masonry.

Herculus What? It's me? It can't be! Look, just let me go! Let me go.

Death I'm sorry, it's not quite time. You see you've not been killed outright. *(It walks slowly round the wall).* The weight of the wall is now shifting slightly. There, it's starting to crush your breastplate.

Herculus No! No! Make it stop! No!

Herculus gives a final scream, and Death takes his hand.

Death Come, it is over.

Music #10 - "Bring Out The Dead"

Death *Your unexpected visitor,
Your uninvited guest.
You see my face, your game is up,
The party's past its best.
I always work by night and day,
I travel by sun and moon.
And though you'd rather I stayed away,
I'll still be with you far too soon.*

Chant 1 *Bring out the dead
All is done and said*

Chant 2 *Come with me
Come with me*

Death *Can you hear the distant fanfare,
Can you hear the call to arm?
If you follow where I lead you,
I'll keep you safe from harm.
The dance is over, song is sung,
Whatever age you be.
You're sure to think that it's too young,
But you must let go and come with me.'*

Chant 1 *Bring out the dead
All is done and said
There is no need for dread
We will wash away the pain.*

Chant 2 *Come with me
Come with me*

[Instrumental]

Death *I'll take away all misery,
And release you from your pain.
Wherever it was you started from,
I'll take you back again.
We'll wander through Elysian field
Into a brighter day.
Where all your fears have been concealed
And hurt and sorrow kept at bay.*

Chant 1 *Bring out the dead
All is done and said
There is no need for dread
We will wash away the pain.*

Chant 2 *Come with me
Come with me*

Exit Death.

**... in this Preview Script, the remainder of the musical
has been deleted from here ...**

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