

Words by Thomas Broughton

Georg Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

ACT ONE

2. Recitative

Lichas

See with what sad dejection in her looks,
 Indulging grief, the mournful princess sits!
 She weeps from morning's dawn to shades of night,
 From gloom of night to redd'ning blush of morn;
 Uncertain of Alcides' destiny,
 Disconsolate his absence she laments.

3. Air

No longer, fate, relentless frown,
 Preserve, great Jove, the hero's life.
 With glory's wreath his actions crown,
 And oh! restore him to his mourning wife.

4. Recitative (accompanied)

Dejanira

O Hercules! Why art thou absent from me?
 Return, my hero, to my arms!
 O gods! how racking are the pains of absence
 To one who fondly loves like me!

5. Air

The world, when day's career is run,
 In darkness mourns the absent sun;
 So I, depriv'd of that dear light,
 That warm'd my breast and cheer'd my sight,
 Deplore in thickest gloom of grief
 The absence of the valiant chief.

6. Recitative

Lichas

Princess! be comforted, and hope the best:
 A few revolving hours may bring him back,
 Once more to bless your longing arms.

Dejanira

Ah no! impossible! He never will return!

Lichas

Forbid it, heav'n, and all ye guardian pow'rs
 That watch o'er virtue, innocence, and love!

Dejanira

My son! dear image of thy absent sire!
 What comfort bring'st thou to thy mother's ear?

Hyllus

Eager to know my father's destiny,
 I bade the priests, with solemn sacrifice,
 Explore the will of heav'n.
 The altar smok'd, the slaughter'd victim bled,
 When lo! around the hallow'd walls a sudden glory blaz'd!
 The priest acknowledg'd the auspicious omen,
 and own'd the present god,
 When, in a moment, the temple shook,
 the glory disappear'd,
 And more than midnight darkness veil'd the place.

Lichas

'Twas dreadful all!

Hyllus

At length the sacred flamen, full of the deity,
 prophetic spoke:

7. Arioso

Hyllus

I feel the god, he swells my breast!
 Before my eyes the future stands confess'd;
 I see the valiant chief in death laid low,
 And flames aspire from Oeta's lofty brow!

8. Recitative

Hyllus

He said, the sacred fury left his breast,
And on the ground the fainting prophet fell.

Dejanira

Then I am lost! o dreadful oracle!
My griefs hang heavy on my tortur'd soul,
And soon will sink me to the realms of night.
There once again I shall behold my Hercules,
Or whirl the lance, or bend the stubborn bow,
Or to the list'ning ghosts his toils recount.

9. Air

Dejanira

There in myrtle shades reclin'd
By streams that thro' Elysium wind,
In sweetest union we shall prove,
Eternity of bliss and love.

10. Recitative

Hyllus

Despair not; but let rising hope suspend excess of grief
Till I have learnt the certainty of my dear father's fate.
To-morrow's sun shall see your Hyllus bend his pious steps,
To seek the hero through the travell'd globe;
If yet he lives, I will restore him to you, or perish in
the search.

11. Air

Where congeal'd the northern streams,
Bound in icy fetters, stand;
Where the sun's intenser beams
Scorch the burning Lybian sand:
By honour, love, and duty led,
There with daring steps I'll tread.

12. Chorus

Oh, filial piety! courageous love!
Go, youth inspir'd, thy virtue prove;
Immortal fame attends thee,
And pitying heav'n befriends thee!

13. Recitative

Lichas

Banish your fears! Alcmena's godlike son lives,
And from sack'd Oechalia,
Which his arms have levell'd with the ground,
Returns a conqueror!

Dejanira

O joyful news! Welcome as rising day to the
benighted world,
Or falling show'rs to the parched earth!
Ye lying omens, hence!
Hence, every anxious thought!

15. Recitative

Lichas

A train of captives, red with honest wounds,
and low'ring on their chains,
Attend the conqueror: but more to grace the pomp
of victory;
The lovely Iöle, Oechalia's princess,
With captive beauty swells the joyful triumph.

Hyllus

My soul is mov'd for th' unhappy princess,
And fain, methinks, I would unbind her chains;
But say, her father, haughty Eurytus?

Lichas

He fell in single combat by the sword of Hercules.

Dejanira

No more, but haste, and wait thy lord's arrival!

18. Recitative

Iöle

Ye faithful followers of the wretched Iöle,
Your bonds sit heavier on me than my own.
Unhappy maids! my fate has dragg'd you down
Like some vast pile that crushes with its fall
the neighb'ring domes
And spreads wide ruin round it.

First Oechalian

You are our mistress still.

Iöle

Alas, Erastia, captivity, like the destroyer Death,
Throws all distinctions down, and slaves are equal.
But, if the gods relent, and give us back to our lost liberty.
Ah me! How soon the flatt'rer Hope is ready with his cordial.
Vain expectation! no!
Adieu for ever, ye smiling joys, and innocent delights
of youth and liberty,
O, sad remembrance!

19. Air

Iöle

Daughter of gods, bright Liberty!
With thee a thousand graces reign,
A thousand pleasures crowd thy train
And hail the liveliest deity.

Recitative

Iöle

But hark! the victor comes!

21. Recitative

Hercules

Thanks to the pow'rs above, but chief to thee,
father of gods,
From whose immortal race I drew my birth,
Now my long toils are o'er and Juno's rage appeas'd.
With pleasure now, at rest, my various labours I review.
Oechalia's fall is added to my titles,
And points the rising summit of my glory.
Fair princess, weep no more! forget these bonds:
In Trachin you are free, as in Oechalia.

Iöle

Forgive me, gen'rous victor,
If a sigh for my dead father,
For my friends, my country, will have its way;
I cannot yet forget that such things were,
And that I once enjoy'd them.

22. Air

Iöle

My father! ah, methinks I see
The sword inflict the deadly wound.
He bleeds, he falls in agony;
Dying he bites the crimson ground.
Peaceful rest, dear parent shade,
Light the earth be on thee laid!
In thy daughter's pious mind
All thy virtues live enshrind.

23. Recitative

Hercules

Now farewell, arms! from hence, the tide of time
Shall bear me gently down to mellow age;
From war to love I fly, my cares to lose
In gentle Dejanira's fond embrace.

24. Air

The god of battle quits the bloody field
And useless hang the glitt'ring spear and shield;
While, all resign'd to conqu'ring beauty's charms
He gives himself to love in Cytherea's arms.

25. Chorus

Crown with festal pomp the day,
Be mirth extravagantly gay,
Bid the grateful altars smoke,
Bid the maids the youths provoke
To join the dance, while music's voice
Tells aloud our rapt'rous joys!

ACT TWO

29. Recitative

Dejanira

It must be so! fame speaks aloud my wrongs,
And ev'ry voice proclaims Alcides' falsehood;
Love, jealousy, and rage at once distract me.

Iöle

What anxious cares untimely thus disturb
The happy consort of the son of Jove?

Dejanira

Insulting maid! I had indeed been happy,
But for the fatal lustre of thy beauty!

30. Air

Dejanira

When beauty sorrow's liv'ry wears,
Our passions take the fair one's part,
Love dips his arrows in her tears
And sends them pointed to the heart.

31. Recitative

Iöle

Whence this unjust suspicion?

Dejanira

Fame of thy beauty (so report informs me),
First brought Alcides to Oechalia's court.
He saw, he lov'd, he ask'd you of your father;
His suit rejected, in revenge he levell'd the haughty
town, and bore away the spoil;
But the rich prize, for which he fought and
conquer'd was Iöle.

Iöle

Ah, no! it was ambition, not slighted love
That laid Oechalia low, and made the wretched
Iöle a captive.
Report, that in the garb of truth disguises the
blackest falsehood,
Has abused your ear with a forged tale;
But oh! let me conjure you, for your dear peace of mind,
Beware of jealousy.

32. Air

Iöle

Ah! think what ills the jealous prove;
Adieu to peace, adieu to love,
Exchang'd for endless pain.
With venom fraught the bosom swells,
And never-ceasing discord dwells
Where harmony should reign.

33. Recitative

Dejanira

It is too sure, that Hercules is false.

Lichas

My godlike master?

Dejanira

Is a traitor, Lichas.—

Traitor to honour, love, and Dejanira!

Lichas

Alcides false? Impossible!

36. Chorus

Jealousy! pervading pest,
Tyrant of the human breast!
How, from slightest causes bred,
Dost thou lift thy hated head.
Trifles light as floating air
Sacred proofs to thee appear.

37. Recitative

Hyllus

She knows my passion, and has heard me breathe
my am'rous vows;

But, deaf to the soft plea, rejects my offer'd love.

See where she stands, like fair Diana, circled by her nymphs.

Iöle

Too well, young prince, I guess the cause that this way
leads your steps.

Why will you urge a suit I must not hear?

Love finds no dwelling in that hapless breast,

Where sorrow and her gloomy train reside.

Hyllus

The soothing hand of all-subduing time
May drive these black intruders from their seat,
And leave the heav'nly mansion of thy bosom
Serene and vacant to a softer guest.

Iöle

And think'st thou Iöle can ever love the son of Hercules,
Whose arms depriv'd her of country, father, liberty?
Impossible!

Hyllus

I own the truths that blast my springing hopes;
Yet oh, permit me, charming maid,
To gaze on those dear beauties that enchant my soul
And view, at least, that heav'n I must despair to gain.

Iöle

Is this, is this the son of Hercules,
For labours fam'd and hardy deeds of arms?
Oh, prince, exert the virtues of thy race,
And call forth all thy father in thy soul.

40. Air

Hyllus

From celestial seats descending,
Joys divine awhile suspending,
Gods have left their heav'n above
To taste the sweeter heav'n of love.
Cease my passion, then, to blame;
Cease to scorn a godlike flame.

41. Chorus

Wanton god of am'rous fires,
Wishes, sighs, and soft desires,
All nature's sons thy laws maintain;
O'er liquid air and swelling main
Extend thy uncontroll'd and boundless reign.

42. Recitative

Dejanira

Yes, I congratulate your titles, swoln with proud
Oechalia's fall;
But oh! I grieve to see the victor to the vanquish'd yield.
How lost, alas! how fall'n from what you were!
Your fame eclips'd, and all your laurels blasted!

Hercules

Unjust reproach! No, Dejanira, no!
While glorious deeds demand a just applause!

43. Air

Hercules

Alcides' name in latest story
Shall with brightest lustre shine;
And future heroes rise to glory
By actions emulating mine.

44. Recitative

Dejanira

Oh glorious pattern of heroic deeds!
The mighty warrior, whom not Juno's hate
Nor a long series of incessant labours could e'er subdue,
A captive maid has conquer'd!
Oh, shame to manhood! Oh, disgrace of arms!

45. Air

Resign thy club and lion's spoils,
And fly from war to female toils;
For the glittering sword and shield,
The spindle and the distaff wield.
Thund'ring Mars no more shall arm thee;
Glory's call no more shall warm thee;
Venus and her whining boy
Shall all thy wanton hours employ.

46. Recitative

Hercules

You are deceived! some villain has belied
My ever-faithful love and constancy.

Dejanira

Would it were so, and that the babbler Fame
Had not through all the Grecian cities spread
the shameful tale!

Hercules

The priests of Jupiter prepare, with solemn rites,
To thank the god for the success of my victorious arms:
The ready sacrifice expects my presence. I go.
Meantime let these suspicions sleep,
Nor causeless jealousy alarm your breast.

48. Recitative

Dejanira

Some kinder pow'r inspire me,
to regain his alienated love,
and bring the wand'rer back!
Ha! lucky thought!
I have a garment, dipt in Nessus' blood,
when from the wound he drew the barbed shaft,
sent by Alcides' hand;
it boasts a wond'rous virtue,
to revive th'expiring flame of love:
so Nessus told me,
when dying to my hand he trusted it.
I will prevail with Hercules to wear it,
and prove its magic force.
Till then be still, my jealous fears,
and let my tongue dissemble the torture of my heart.
The princes Iöle! Forgive me, princess,
if my jealous frenzy too roughly greeted you!
I see, and blame the error,
that misled me to insult that innocence and beauty.

Iöle

Thank the gods, that have inspir'd
your mind with calmer thoughts,
and from your breast remov'd the vulture, jealousy!
Live, and be happy in Alcides's love,
while wretched Iöle...

Dejanira

Princess, no more!
but lift those beauteous eyes
to the fair prospect of returning happiness.
At my request Alcides shall restore you
to liberty and your paternal throne.

ACT THREE

55. Recitative

Lichas

Ye sons of Trachin, mourn your valiant chief,
 Return'd from foes and dangers threat'ning death,
 To fall, inglorious, by a woman's hand.

First Trachinian

Oh, doleful tidings!

Lichas

As the hero stood, prepar'd for sacrifice,
 And festal pomp adorn'd the temple,
 These unlucky hands presented him,
 In Dejanira's name, a costly robe,
 The pledge of love's renewal.
 With smiles that testified his rising joy,
 Alcides o'er his manly shoulders threw the treach'rous gift;
 But when the altar's flame began
 To shed its warmth upon his limbs,
 The clinging robe, by cursed art envenom'd,
 Through all his joints dispers'd a subtle poison.
 Frantic with agonising pain,
 He flings his tortur'd body on the sacred floor,
 Then strives to rip the deadly garment off:
 But with it, tears the bleeding mangled flesh:
 His dreadful cries the vaulted roof returns!

56. Air

Lichas

Oh, scene of unexamp'd woe!
 Oh, sun of glory, sunk so low!
 What language can our sorrow tell?
 Gallant, unhappy chief—farewell!

57. Recitative

First Trachinian

Oh, fatal jealousy!
 Oh, cruel recompense of virtue, in severest labours tried.

58. Chorus

Tyrants now no more shall dread
 On necks of vanquish'd slaves to tread.
 Horrid forms of monstrous birth
 Again shall vex the groaning earth.
 Fear of punishment is o'er,
 The world's avenger is no more.

59. Air

Hercules

Oh, Jove! what land is this?
 What clime accurst—by raging Phoebus scorcht?
 I burn—I burn! tormenting fire consumes me.
 Oh! I die, some ease, ye pitying pow'rs!
 I rage with more than Stygian pains;
 Along my fev'rish veins like liquid fire
 The subtle poison hastes.
 Boreas! bring thy northern blast, and through my
 bosom roar!
 Or, Neptune, kindly pour the sea's collected flood
 Into my breast, and cool my boiling blood!

60. Recitative

Hyllus

Great Jove! relieve his pains!

Hercules

Was it for this unnumber'd toils I bore?
 Oh, Juno and Eurystheus, I absolve ye!
 Your keenest malice yield to Dejanira—
 Mistaken, cruel, treacherous Dejanira!
 Oh, this curst robe!
 It clings to my torn sides and drinks my vital blood!

Hyllus

Alas! my father!

Hercules

My son, observe thy dying sire's request:
 While yet I live, bear me to Oeta's top;
 There, on the summit of that cloud-capp'd hill,
 The tow'ring oak and lofty cypress fell,
 And raise a funeral pile;
 Upon it lay me: then fire the kindling heap,
 That I may mount on wings of flame
 To mingle with the gods!

Hyllus

Oh, glorious thought! worthy the son of Jove!

Hercules

My pains redouble. Oh! be quick, my son,
 And bear me to the scene of glorious death.

Hyllus

How is the hero fall'n!

61. Air

Hyllus

Let not fame the tidings spread
 To proud Oechalia's conquer'd wall;
 The baffled foe will lift his head,
 And triumph in his victor's fall.

62. Recitative and Air**Dejanira**

Where shall I fly? where hide this guilty head?
 Oh, fatal error of misguided love!
 Oh, cruel Nessus, how art thou reveng'd?
 Wretched I am! by me Alcides dies!
 These impious hands have sent my injur'd lord untimely
 to the shades.
 Let me be mad! chain me, ye furies, to your iron beds,
 And lash my guilty ghost with whips of scorpions!
 See, see! they come! Alecto with her snakes
 Megaera fell, and black Tisiphone!
 See the dreadful sisters rise!
 Their baneful presence taints the skies!
 See, see! the snaky whips they bear!
 What yellings rend my tortur'd ear!
 Hide me from their hated sight,
 Friendly shades of blackest night.
 Alas! no rest the guilty find
 From the pursuing furies of the mind.

63. Recitative**Dejanira**

Lo the fair fatal cause of all this ruin!
 Fly from my sight, detested sorc'ress, fly,
 Lest my ungovern'd fury rush upon thee,
 And scatter thee to all the winds of heav'n!
 Alas! I rave! the lovely maid is innocent,
 And I alone the guilty cause of all.

Iöle

Though torn from ev'ry joy,
 A father's love, my native land, and dear priz'd liberty,
 By Hercules' arms, still must I pity
 The countless woes of this unhappy house.

64. Air**Iöle**

My breast with tender pity swells
 At sight of human woe;
 And sympathetic anguish feels
 Where'er heav'n strikes the blow.

65. Recitative**Priest of Jupiter**

Princess, rejoice! whose heav'n directed hand
 Has rais'd Alcides to the court of Jove.

Dejanira

Speak, priest! what means this dark mysterious greeting?
 That he is dead, and by this fatal hand,
 Too sure, alas! my bleeding heart divines.

Priest

Borne (by his own command) to Oeta's top,
 Stretch'd on a funeral pile the hero lay,
 The crackling flames surround his manly limbs—
 When lo! an eagle, stooping from the clouds,
 Swift to the burning pile his flight directs;
 There lights a moment, then with speedy wing
 Regains the sky.

Astonish'd, we consult the sacred grove,
 Where sounds oracular from vocal oaks
 Disclose the will of Jove.

Here the great sire his offspring's fate declar'd:
 "His mortal part by eating fires consum'd,
 "His part immortal to Olympus borne,
 "There with assembl'd deities to dwell!"

67. Recitative**Dejanira**

Words are too faint to speak the warring passions
 that combat in my breast
 Grief, wonder, joy, by turns deject and elevate my soul.

Priest

Nor less thy destiny, illustrious maid,
 Is Jove's peculiar care, who thus decrees:
 Hymen, with purest joys of love,
 Shall crown Oechalia's princess and the son of Hercules.

Hyllus

How blest is Hyllus, if the lovely Iöle,
 Consenting, ratifies the gift of heav'n.

Iöle

What Jove ordains, can Iöle resist?

70. Chorus

To him your gratitude duly belongs,
 Theme of fair liberty's far-sounding songs!
 Aw'd by his name, unjust pow'r shuns the light,
 And slav'ry hides her head in depths of night,
 While happy climes to his example owe
 The blessings that from peace and freedom flow.

