

# HOUSEHOLD GODS

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A COMEDY

BY

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PALLANZA

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TO

*LEILA WADDELL*

## SCENE

THE HEARTH OF CRASSUS; AFTERWARDS THE LAWNS,  
THE WOODS, THE LAKE, THE ISLE.



## CHARACTERS

CRASSUS, a barbarian from Britain.

ADELA, his wife, a noble Roman lady.

ALICIA, a servant in the house.

A STATUE OF PAN.

A FAUN.



## HOUSEHOLD GODS

THE SCENE is at the hearth of CRASSUS, where is a little bronze altar dedicated to the Lares and Penates. A pale flame rises from the burning sandal-wood, on which CRASSUS throws benzoin and musk. He is standing in deep dejection.

CRASSUS.

SMOKE without fire!  
No thrill of tongues licks up  
The offerings in the cup.  
Dead falls desire.

Black smoke thou art,  
O altar-flame, that dost dismember,  
Devour the hearth, to leave no ember  
To warm this heart.

I see her still—  
Adela dancing here  
Till dim gods did appear  
To work our will.



The delicate girl!  
Diaphanous gossamer  
Subtly revealing her  
Brave breast of pearl!

Now—she's withdrawn  
At dusk to the wild woods,  
Mystic beatitudes  
That dure till dawn.

Let life exclaim  
Against these things of spirit,  
Mankind that disinherit  
Of love's pure flame!

*[He bends before the altar and begins to weep.]*

Ye household gods!  
By these male tears I swear  
That ye shall grant this prayer.  
All things at odds

Shall be put straight—  
Harmonized, reconciled  
By some appointed child  
Of some far Fate!

*[A curtain has been drawn aside during this invocation, and ALICIA advances. She smiles subtly upon him; and, giving a strange gesture, makes one or two noiseless steps of dancing.]*

ALICIA.

Master, still sad?

CRASSUS.

These faint and fearful shores  
Of time are beaten by the surge of sense,  
Love worn away—by love?—to indifference.  
Who knows what god—or demon—she adores?  
Or in what wood she shelters, or what grove  
Sees her profane our sacrament of love?

ALICIA.

I saw her follow  
The stream in the hollow  
Where never Apollo  
Abides.  
So thick are the trees  
That never the breeze  
Stirs them, or sees  
What satyr inhabits the glen, what nymph in the  
pools of it hides.

Lighter of foot  
Than a sylph or a fairy,  
Sinuous, wary,  
I passed from the airy  
Lawns, where the flute  
Of the winds made tremulous music for man.

I followed the ripple  
Of the stream; I crept  
Where the waters wept—  
The floss in the foss  
Gurgling across  
The bosses of moss,  
Like a dryad's nipple  
In the mouth of Pan!

CRASSUS.

O pearl of the house! you came to the end?

ALICIA.

The dusk of the slave, the dawn of a friend?

CRASSUS.

Freedom is thine for the skill and the will.

ALICIA.

The skill is mine—but the will lies still,  
Still as the earth that dare not stir  
Till the kiss of the sun awaken her!

CRASSUS.

Yet at these secrets and riddles? Behold!  
I can fill thy lap with a harvest of gold.

ALICIA.

Yet all the gold you could give to me  
Would fall at my feet when I rose to be free.

CRASSUS.

What will you then?

ALICIA.

No gift from men.

Of my own free will I give you wit,

(O man so sorely in need of it!)

And happiness; and the flame that hath dwindled

On this dull hearth shall be rekindled.

But this you must swear:

To will, and to dare,

To seek the spirit and slay the sense;

And for this hour

To give me power

To lead you in silent obedience,

Though I bade you fall on your sword. . . .

CRASSUS.

Enough!

I give my life as I gave my love.

ALICIA.

O! love you have not understood.

You have not guessed its secret food.

You have not seen its single eye;

But fear and doubt and jealousy

Have risen, and now your love is trembling

Like a mountebank dissembling

When his trick's detected. Come!

To find home we must leave home.

CRASSUS.

Starless and moonless, hidden in cloud,  
The night's one flame of pearl.

ALICIA.

The bat flaps; the owl hoots aloud.

CRASSUS.

Lead on; I trust you, girl.

ALICIA.

You are bold to trust me; or, have you divined  
My secret?

CRASSUS.

No; the crystal of your mind  
Shows only faint disturbing images,  
Things passing strange, as if enchanted seas  
Kept their great swell upon it, and strange fish  
Played in its oily depths. Some monstrous wish,  
The shadow of some unspeakable desire,  
Strikes my heart cold, and sets my brain on fire.

ALICIA.

Learn this, as we pass through the portico:  
Fear nothing; there is nothing you can know!  
And by these terraces and steps that gleam  
Wintry, although the summer night is hot,  
This—what we seek is never what we find!

Life is a dream, like love; and from the dream  
If we may wake, we never find it what  
We would; for the wisdom of a mightier mind  
Leads us in its own ways  
To a perfected praise.

CRASSUS.

Why are these shadows thrown across the lawn  
From the elms and yews? They were not wont to reach  
Beyond the branches of that copper-beech.

ALICIA.

Attend the dawn  
Of an unknown comet, that shall come  
From the unfathomable wells of space  
Into its halidom.

CRASSUS.

I know it not. Last night I walked alone  
Here, and saw nothing.

ALICIA.

I was not with you!  
There is no God upon the eternal throne  
Of stars begemming the bewildering blue  
Unless one has the eyes to see him. Think  
How we two stand upon the brink  
Of nothing! Here's a globe, whereto we trust,  
No larger than the smallest speck of dust

Or mote in the sunbeam is to that sun's self,  
And we are like dead leaves in autumn's whirl  
Of wind upon it.

CRASSUS.

Mystify me, girl!

It is the right of an elf.  
Surely your flickering fire  
Will draw me to some mire!

ALICIA.

Here the stream dips its mouth into the wood.  
So does youth's calm and chaste beatitude  
Touch the black mouth of Love, the ancient whore.

CRASSUS.

Girl! what a scorpion leaping from your lips!

ALICIA.

My mouth stings as no scorpion ever stang.  
In this round impudent smiling face of mine  
There is a poison fiercer than all wine;  
And from these eyes more subtle sorrows pour  
Than you can dream. These teeth have been at grips  
With gods; I have sung what no girl ever sang.  
These ears have heard  
An insufferable word!

CRASSUS.

What do you mean?

ALICIA.

The secret's in a kiss.

Here are no kisses. Here great Artemis  
Rules; only in the woodland may a man  
Hide his eyes from her, pledge himself to Pan.  
Come! through the tangled arches  
Of cypresses and larches,  
Stoop; under Artemis we walked upright;  
But this is Pan's home, and the House of Night.  
*[They enter the wood.]*

CRASSUS.

So when I stoop, my cheek comes close to yours.  
Give me a kiss.

ALICIA.

The poisonous apple lures  
Thus the boy's mouth. Beware!

CRASSUS.

O you are fair!  
Fairer than ever! In this tangle of trees  
Your hot breath wraps you in perfume.

ALICIA.

There is some gloom or doom,  
A bitter harsh ingredient  
In these my sorceries  
Of animal scent.



CRASSUS.

Yes! there is fear mixed with the fascination.  
It is the reverence that chastity, be sure!  
Gains from the impure.

ALICIA.

O virtuous nation!  
It is the fear of the uninitiate  
Before the throne of Fate  
The hierophant.

CRASSUS.

Kiss me, however!

ALICIA.

Did I grant  
This favour, all were lost. It is your truth  
To Adela that tempts my youth.

*[Henceforth ALICIA shakes with silent laughter.]*

CRASSUS.

What little breasts you have!

ALICIA.

Ay, maiden breasts!  
Would you betray my oath?

CRASSUS.

My will contests  
My wishes.

ALICIA.

Wait, and you shall surely see  
Part of the secret that ensorcells me.  
See all these bosses! Is it not  
As if a Titan smote himself into the earth,  
And was caught into her, made one with her?

CRASSUS.

The scent is fierce and hot  
Like a rutting panther's slot.  
Yet you are matched with mirth,  
Shaking each other like two wrestlers.

ALICIA.

What should stir  
Your melancholy but laughter?

CRASSUS.

Look, before us  
Light streams, a tremulous chorus.  
Oh, it is vague and vacillating!

ALICIA.

Love,  
Young love of maidens, is the soul thereof.  
And in the midst, behold, O man!  
The image of great Pan.

CRASSUS.

I fear him.

ALICIA.

Go and lie there, at his feet.

Lie supine! Lie on that moss-covered root,

While I draw forth the flute

And make a marvellous music.

*[She ceases laughing and begins to play.]*

CRASSUS.

O I writhe

Beneath the force of lips, of fingers lithe

That touch the delicate stops so delicately.

ALICIA.

Hush!

I have drawn the bird from the bush.

Pan will appear anon.

CRASSUS.

Ah! Ah! . . . Ah! Ah!

ALICIA.

This music moves you. Now I'll play a tune

That would make mad the melancholy moon.

This.

CRASSUS.

Ah! you tear my soul out with the trills.  
Your fingers play like summer lightning on the shaft.  
It is like a storm on the mountains when it shrills;  
Like the angry sea when it booms. Hark!

ALICIA.

Some god laughed.

CRASSUS.

Your mouth is like some god's. It burns and blooms  
With fire unheard of, with unguessed perfumes.  
O let me kiss you!

ALICIA.

So you stop my song!                    [*She ceases the tune.*]

CRASSUS.

There is another song.

ALICIA.

You do me wrong.  
For you love Adela!

CRASSUS.

By God, girl, no!

I love Alicia.

ALICIA.

Ah! you love her so!                    [*She laughs.*]

CRASSUS.

Your laugh is shocking—why do you mock me, dear?

ALICIA.

Because you will not guess my secret here.  
But—put your arms about my neck, and swear  
You love me, and will always keep them there.  
Then I might dare.

CRASSUS.

I swear it. O my sweet!

ALICIA.

Then take my kiss.

CRASSUS.

Your mouth is like a rose of fire. But what is this?  
I cannot bear it.

ALICIA.

Ail Uhu! Uhu!

It is my heart; this arrow strikes me through.  
Stir not one muscle for a moment. Death!  
You beast, you kill me with your urgent breath.

CRASSUS.

O how I love you!

*[He moves violently.]*

ALICIA.

Fool! Now all my pain  
Must be gone through again.  
It is sure your chastity's unstained by crime;  
You do the wrong thing just at the right time!

CRASSUS.

Why do you taunt me? All the wood is spring's,  
And love is hovering o'er us with his wings.

ALICIA.

Sub pennis, penis!

CRASSUS.

Hush! you break the spell.

ALICIA.

Oh! you great fools of men, I know you well.  
But nothing is so detrimental  
To love as to be sentimental.  
I will yet make you wise.  
Know that I have the magic to disguise  
Myself in many ways. Do you feel this?  
(Lie still, this heaven were ruined by a kiss!)  
I am a butterfly, such idle flitting  
As to a flower like you is fitting.  
Now I'm a mole. Do you think you know me now?  
Here is the earthworm severed by the plough.

CRASSUS.

You are a witch. I want your love; you give  
Only love's comedy.

ALICIA.

The way to live  
Is to find comedy and tragedy  
In everything. But if you cannot see  
Through to the Bacchanal spirit, this should suit.  
Here is the blacksmith hammering a flute.

CRASSUS.

Oh love, love, kiss me!

ALICIA.

I will forge a ring  
Of bloom of blood-kisses upon your neck,  
Till it is like a garden of roses in late spring.

CRASSUS.

"Soft, and stung softly, fairer for a fleck."

ALICIA.

O marvellous nation!  
Vanity, dullness, slobber, and quotation!

CRASSUS.

Why do you love me if you scorn me so?

ALICIA.

Why, did I say I loved you? I say no.

CRASSUS.

Why do you make love?

ALICIA.

To beguile the hour;  
To crown my rose-wreath with a greener flower;  
To do my master's bidding, that 's to give  
Life to yourself, who only think you live.  
But listen! Have you seen the nine waves roll  
Monotonous upon the shoal,  
Rising and falling like a maiden asleep;  
Then with a lift and a leap  
The ninth wave curls, and breaks upon the beach,  
And rushes up it, swallowing the sand?  
I am that ocean. . . . Now, you understand?

CRASSUS.

Alicia! O! this is unbearable.  
Surely this wave washes the shore of hell!

ALICIA.

Each follows each  
Remorseless and indifferent as Nature  
Is to each creature.



CRASSUS.

Wonderful, wonderful woman!

*[She throws her head back, and laughs.]*

ALICIA.

Now, you think

You know my secret. I have given you drink,  
And you are wise. But hush! to all emotion  
Save this the pulse and swell of Ocean.  
For at the last with mouth and fingers wried  
All must proclaim the triumph of the tide.

CRASSUS.

Ah! still you mock me with your cruel laugh.

ALICIA.

It is your foolish epitaph.

CRASSUS.

But this can be no mockery. Heave and sway  
And curl and thrust—these waves are not at play.

ALICIA.

You feel the ocean breaking on the shoal;  
But passionless and moveless is its soul.

CRASSUS.

Ah! but your soul is in your breath.

ALICIA.

Only as is the graven image of death  
Which men call life, and ignorantly adore!

CRASSUS.

Spare me! I cannot bear you more.

ALICIA.

Then will I drown you. Lock your fingers fast  
In mine, and let our mouths mix at the last.

*[The statue of PAN is seen to be alive.]*

PAN.

Shrill, shrill  
Over the hill!  
The hunter is hot—this is the kill!  
Scream! Scream!  
Dissolving the dream  
Of life, the knife to the heart of the wife!  
The fountain jets  
Its flood of blood,  
And the moss that it wets  
Is an amethyst flame of violets.

Who shall escape  
Murder and rape  
When I am alive in my solemn shape?  
Shrill, shrill,

Over the hill!  
The hunter is hot—this is the kill!  
The heart of the home  
Is a fury of foam;  
The storm is awake, and the billows comb.  
But though I be  
Their frenzy of glee,  
I am also the passionless soul of the sea!

Mine eyes glint fire,  
And my cruel lips curl;  
Mine the desire  
Of the god and the girl;  
But fierier and fleeter,  
And subtler and sweeter  
Than the race of the rhythm, the march of the metre,  
Is the shrilling, shrilling  
Of the knife in the killing  
That ends, when it must,  
(O the throb and the thrust!)  
In death, in the dust,  
The silence, the stillness, of satiate lust,  
The solemn pause  
When the veil withdraws  
And man looks on his god, on the Causeless Cause.  
Still, still,  
Under the hill!  
The hunter is dead—this is the kill!

CRASSUS.

Pan spoke.

ALICIA.

Pan never speaks till man is dumb,  
And only then if he be like a child  
Silently curled within its mother's womb,  
Or feeding at her breast. There is a wild  
Way also—when his dumbness is of death.  
And there's a first and second death. Remember  
To die so that no god's or angel's breath  
May quicken into life the wasted ember!

CRASSUS.

I am dead now.

ALICIA.

But I must raise you up.  
The night grows darker; all Pan's light is gone,  
And you and I are pledged to sup  
Upon a secret.

CRASSUS.

All your secret shone.

*[She laughs again.]*

ALICIA.

Oh, when you know it! But you must divine  
Adela's shrine.

CRASSUS.

I am weary of Adela grown chaste and chill.

ALICIA.

The hunter lags ; how heavy is the hill !  
But you are bound to Adela.

CRASSUS.

To you !

ALICIA.

But you have given me freedom. I will leave you.

CRASSUS.

What have I done to grieve you ?

ALICIA.

You have been the solemn fool with face awry  
That I have gathered in my ecstasy.  
You are only a vulgar primrose I have plucked.

CRASSUS.

At least, she-devil, you have been well—treated.

ALICIA.

O tragic farce—not even rimes completed !  
Nay, darling ! no rebellion. When you know

My secret, you will understand. You are bound  
To Adela within the portico,  
To me upon this ground.  
By day, in life, adore the Larcs, man!  
By night, in death, make offering to Pan!  
Can you cut day from night by any endeavour?  
If so, both life and death were lost for ever.  
Come, the stream steepens.

CRASSUS.

This road leads to hell.

ALICIA.

The way to heaven is shorter.

CRASSUS.

Who can tell?

ALICIA.

I have measured it.

CRASSUS.

You, girl?

ALICIA.

It is not hard.

CRASSUS.

What did you make the height of it?

ALICIA.

One yard.

CRASSUS.

You always mock me?

ALICIA.

Pity of my youth!

I swerve not from, you stumble at, the truth.

CRASSUS.

I like not jests. This is a serious journey.

ALICIA.

Why did you make a mocker your attorney?  
The way to Rome leads through the Apennines.  
Bacchus has horns beneath the crown of vines.  
If you fear horns, make some polite excuse  
Not to invoke him by the name Zagreus!

A FAUN [*Passing among the trees*].

Ye thought me a lamb

With a crown of thorns:

I am royal, a ram

With death in my horns.

So mild and soft

And feminine,

Ye held me aloft  
And frowned on sin!  
But I was awake  
In your clasp as I lay;  
I roused the snake  
From its nest of clay;  
And ere ye knew  
I had sunk my forehead  
Through and through;  
Harsh and horrid  
Through all the pleasure  
Of rose and vine  
I thrust my treasure,  
The cone of the pine.  
Irru's maid  
Was easily sated,  
For she was afraid  
When Irru mated!

CRASSUS.

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

ALICIA.

You would not laugh

Were you the maid!

CRASSUS.

How could I be?



ALICIA.

Great calf!

But you are all the same, blaspheme and jeer  
At any mystery beyond your sphere  
Of beer, and beef, and beer, and beef, and beer.  
Now you have frightened the shy god!

CRASSUS.

Why heed?

Between your—arms—is all the god I need.

ALICIA.

Prudish and coarse to the last. Now hush indeed!  
The stream kisses the lake. We near the shrine.  
Stir no snapped twig. Let your foot—even yours—  
Fall like a fawn's.

CRASSUS.

Your breath is like new wine.

ALICIA.

Hush now! no porpoise gambols!

CRASSUS.

How obscure's

The glimmer of the lake. Is that the isle?

ALICIA.

Yes! in that shadow lurks a smile.  
See; from that jagged cloud Diana starts  
Like a deer from the brake; her silver splendour darts  
Through the crisp air to the grove upon the isle . . .  
Do you see her? Do you see her?

CRASSUS.

Monstrous! Vile!

These eyes betray me.

ALICIA.

No! your Adela lies  
With arms thrown back, head tilted, open thighs.  
Her lips flame out like poppies in the dusk.  
The breeze brings back to us a scent of musk.  
Her mouth is oozing kisses!

CRASSUS.

Filthy harlot!

ALICIA.

I never fed on a superber scarlet.  
And look! the wonder of plumes that foams upon  
Her tidal breast—oh, but a swan! a swan!  
A swan snow-white with his sole scarlet hidden  
In the abode forbidden!

O but his eye swoons as his broad beak slips  
Within her luscious lips.  
O but—I cannot see—I long to die  
Alike for wonder—and for jealousy!

CRASSUS.

Vile, filthy whore! I'll catch you at it.

ALICIA.

Soft!

See how his feathers hold her soul aloft!

CRASSUS.

Beast! Have you brought me through the wood for  
this?

ALICIA.

No wonder I must teach you how to kiss.

CRASSUS.

I'll clip his wings.

ALICIA.

Sub pennis, penis! 'Slife!

It's not the wings of him that clip your wife.

CRASSUS.

Thou art as filthy a creature as she!

ALICIA.

Fat fool!

All your emotions vary with your——

CRASSUS.

What?

ALICIA.

Your state of health.

CRASSUS.

Be off with you, foul——

ALICIA.

Well?

CRASSUS.

I'll swim and stab them. The black mouth of hell  
Yawns for their murder.

ALICIA.

I'll be at the death.

Dive then, but softly. Scarcely draw your breath.

CRASSUS.

O, she's unwary!

ALICIA.

Is your love forgotten?

CRASSUS.

All love is rotten.

ALICIA.

But your pure love for me you boasted of?

CRASSUS.

Ay, that was perfect love.

ALICIA.

You love me then, not her?

CRASSUS.

Indeed I do.

ALICIA.

Swear me the oath anew!

CRASSUS.

I swear to love you till the world shall end.

ALICIA.

Then, Crassus, I will always be your friend.

CRASSUS.

Ah, that is good! You do not mock me now!

ALICIA.

Creep softly to the land. Kiss but my brow.  
My curls are wet. . . . No, never touch me there!

CRASSUS.

Why? Have I not?

ALICIA.

You have not.

CRASSUS.

Just my hand.

ALICIA.

You disobey your mistress's command?  
The time is near when you shall see  
The keyhole of my comedy!

CRASSUS.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

ALICIA.

Hush, you coarse slave; we'll surprise  
Your good wife in her mystic exercise.  
Quick, through the bramble!

*[They burst through upon ADELA.]*

CRASSUS.

Now, you beast, I've got you!  
The curse of God, and plague of Naples, rot you!  
For this white brute—one slit!

*[He cuts the throat of THE SWAN with his dagger.]*

ADELA.

Oh love betrayed!  
O my dead beauty! Faugh! deceitful maid.  
Not Crassus found me out. Had I the wings  
Of my dead love—oh love!—

ALICIA.

Why, wondrous things!

ADELA.

These nails shall serve. A servant!

CRASSUS.

She shall be  
My wife, damned witch, when I have done with thee!  
*[THE SWAN dies.]*

ADELA.

I'll kill her now. But see! my swan is dead.

ALICIA.

Yes! and what light is breaking overhead?  
What blaze of blue and gold envelops us?

CRASSUS.

O marvel! O miraculous!

ADELA.

What is it? Why, my lover's life, in me  
Once concentrated, now diffused, illumines  
The endless reaches of eternity  
With infinite brilliance, with intense perfumes.

ALICIA.

O then your lover was some god's disguise.

ADELA.

And you have robbed me. Now beware your eyes!  
[*She springs at ALICIA, who guards herself  
easily. But in the struggle her robe tears.*]

ALICIA.

Take care!

ADELA.

A boy!



CRASSUS.

A boy! Then what am I?

ALICIA.

That is the key-word of the comedy.

You thought you had two vices at your need;

But she had Jove and you had Ganymede.

*[They are struck dumb and still with amazement. ALICIA claps her hands four times.*

Sweep through the air, bright blaze of eagle-wings!

Crassus, sub pennis, penis! How he swings

His bulk from yonder sightless poise, to bear

Me back to the Dominion of the air

Where I shall bear the cup of Jupiter!

Blind babes, love one another, no less true

Because the gods have deigned to dwell with you!

*[The eagle bears GANYMEDE aloft.*

CRASSUS.

Adela! these are mysteries too great

For you and me to estimate.

But, widowed both, come, seek domestic charms

As we were wont, in one another's arms!

What perfect moss for you to lie upon!

ADELA.

I am your wife, dear Crassus.

*(sotto voce)* Oh, my swan!

CURTAIN.

