

At the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle

CONDUCTED BY E. WYE

THE WRATH OF LATONA

LAND PLAY IN TWO ACTS, A PRELUDE AND AN EPILOGUE

ACT II

SCENE: Same as Act I. Two hours later.

GLAUCUS. Well, what do you say?

SLAVE. I am tired. *You* know how to make one work.

GLAUCUS. Fail not to remember, base slave, the august master's commands. He told you to meet him. What, you linger here in this desirable spot when you should be sweating on the road? Get out! Yet stay—I've a question to propound. Do you think these surroundings become me?

SLAVE. I know little of that.

GLAUCUS. You blackguard, do you dispute with me—with me? Listen. I have seen the future in a vision, in a dream. Through the power of this gold (he looks at gold piece) mine will be a wonderful future.

SLAVE. Yes, your honor.

GLAUCUS. This piece of gold has within it the magic power of development and expansion—from it may come much from little. That is why I treasure it. Do you follow me?

SLAVE. I do your honor.

GLAUCUS. But wait, you have not heard half. Personality, individual initiative, native genius, character—these alone count. If, for example, you had two drachmas, could you make them grow to two hundred? Tell me that!

SLAVE. I never had more than two obols.

GLAUCUS. Exactly—nor ever will. The soul of man must rise before he can achieve success. Vision! that is the word. Now look at me!

SLAVE. I see you.

GLAUCUS. Look at my feet.

SLAVE. They are ample.

GLAUCUS. Look at my head.

SLAVE. It also seems to be large.

GLAUCUS. My feet are the feet of a commoner. My head is the head of a great man. Do you follow me, slave?

SLAVE. Had I not better go to find my master? He waits.

GLAUCUS. One moment. The power of initiative, as I said, is great. It leads to efficiency. Efficiency, that is the thing. Am I efficient or am I not? Tell me that, you son of a cook!

SLAVE. I cannot say.

GLAUCUS. This child knows more than you. (A child has passed over to the water from the wood and is eating some fruit. Glaucus stops her.) Child, do you know what efficiency is? But never mind—Let me see that

beautiful pomegranate—(He takes the fruit from the child and begins eating it. The child is displeased and returns to her companions.)

SLAVE. But my master is waiting for me.

GLAUCUS. One moment. As I said before, I have had a vision, a dream. Hear me. I see, as in a dream, myself as manager of an inn, a hostelry. The property may be the property of Neocles, but I am the innkeeper. Hospitality, thou mayest be a good thing, a religious thing, but to my mind thou must be paid for. My inn is located here where the two roads meet, both leading from the coast to the city. Excellent. Why excellent? Because travellers and traders and merchants and sea-captains must pass this way if they would reach the city. In my vision, there is no more taking the lower road, as at present. According to my dream I intercept these travellers, as it were. I net them, so to speak. And having them in my toils I enrich myself at their expense—all in a perfectly legitimate, gentlemanly manner. Thus, I do not deal in fiery liquors. I am a wholesale and retail victualler in, what do you suppose? In water. My license is for water only. I advertise water. I stimulate the consumption of water. I sell bloaters to make my customers drink water. I exploit external as well as internal applications of water. I maintain baths, hot and cold, a hydropathic establishment, a water cure. My plant is complete in every detail. I have thought it out carefully. I have a schedule of prices—single entrance, season tickets, commutation. (Intimately to slave.) I ask you to imagine the following. Are you hungry? I mean, are you thirsty?

SLAVE. Yes, I am.

GLAUCUS. Two obols, please.

SLAVE. (Not understanding) I haven't got them.

GLAUCUS. *Imagine* you had them. Two obols, I say.

SLAVE. Well?

GLAUCUS. You stupid blockhead, give me the obols.

SLAVE. (Searching his pocket.) I've lost them.

GLAUCUS. Then get out. You can't have any water.

SLAVE. No water?

GLAUCUS. That's what I said.

SLAVE. Then I'm going down to master.

GLAUCUS. One moment. I repeat. It is the greatest plan ever thought of. I did not tell all this to Neocles. He hasn't brains enough to appreciate it. He has no imagination. It is a gold mine. It is a mint. I shall charge all the traffic will bear. Soon I shall be rich. My position in the world will be changed. As I pass through the market-place the stall-keepers will bow obsequiously. (He imitates them.) When I enter the theatre there will be a buzz. At the games I shall have a front seat. My largess will be expected and looked for. I shall smile on

the spectators as I draw the gold pieces, thus, from my pouch. Waving my arm majestically I will toss the coins to the rabble. "O Lycians, take of these drachmas—" (With enthusiasm and grandiloquence Glaucus makes a sweeping gesture and the gold-piece flies off at a tangent and hits the water several feet from the bank. A sudden change comes over him. Realizing his loss he is seized with chagrin and dismay. The slave begins to laugh at his discomfiture.) Why do you stand there grinning, without so much as helping me? I'll knock your head off for you. Into the water with you and get me my gold. Did you see it enter the water? Maybe it lodged on the bank. Where is it? Oh, oh, to think I have lost it! What shall I do? (The slave runs off at last and disappears down the road.) You villain, I believe you've got it. No, I saw the ripples on the water. Oh, why do I not know how to swim? (Turning and observing the children, who are watching him.) An obol to the one who will get me my gold. Some of you can swim—in with you!

MYRA. No, my children. This water is for wayfarers to drink. We will not pollute it.

A CHILD. Is not what this man has been saying very impious and wicked?

OTHER CHILDREN. It seems so to us.

OTHER CHILDREN. To us, too.

SHEPHERD BOY. What would become of my mother if she had to pay for every drink our sheep and cattle took?

MYRA. It is a preposterous idea. I hope such wickedness will never come into the world. I feel certain that my father as magistrate will advise the council never to sell this beautiful little lake to anyone.

(Glaucus hearing the sound of approaching footsteps hides behind a rock by the water bank.)

NEOCLES. (Puffing and panting, to slave, who is assisting him.) I'll give you twenty lashes when I get you home. What do you mean by your impertinence? You say he kept you? Who kept you? Who dared do this?

SLAVE. Please your worship, Glaucus.

NEOCLES. (Raging.) That scoundrel! So help me Zeus, I've a mind to kill him! Did I not tell you distinctly to come for me? Without your arm in coming up the hill my heart has nearly cracked with the exertion. Is Bion here? (Scornfully.) No, of course not. (To slave.) Go down the road and watch for the noble magistrate. (Exit slave.)

GLAUCUS. (Cautiously showing himself.) Your honor, do calm yourself this warm day. Shall I get you some water to drink?

NEOCLES. Yes—no—business first. There'll be plenty of time for drinking. Water is not good for me.

GLAUCUS. True, I forgot. Your honor always did like the fragrant Lycian wine better. (Smacks his lips.)

NEOCLES. I am souring on the whole proposition.

GLAUCUS. Souring? Why? It will only take a little longer.

NEOCLES. If it were not that I am publicly committed to your wonderful scheme I should throw it down. It no longer appeals to me.

GLAUCUS. Say what you will, it figures out all right.

NEOCLES. It is too slow. I like my rapid town interests better. I'm sorry I ever signed the petition.

GLAUCUS. (Pausing as if to think.) True, that section B. development in town certainly was a good one! It too was an inspiration on my part, yet you must admit that. But you can't put all your eggs into one basket.

NEOCLES. I follow you entirely too much. I say again, if I hadn't listened to you I'd'a kept out of this.

GLAUCUS. What do you see wrong about it? It will make money for everyone in it—except me.

NEOCLES. I have doubts about the council. Bion is against the plan.

GLAUCUS. Maybe Bion can be sweetened, in spite of his anger this morning.

NEOCLES. Not likely. He's a "reformer."

GLAUCUS. Let us see the other members of the council individually then.

NEOCLES. No time for that. Our option, which is conditional, expires today by limitation.

GLAUCUS. What's the use in giving up? I think you take the wrong view of this matter. While we are waiting for Bion, let us walk down the road a short distance, where we can be alone. It is worth reconsidering. Besides I consider the property is dirt cheap; that is the principal point. (Neocles appears to be reconciled, nods his assent and they exit.)

SHEPHERD BOY. (To Myra.) I just now heard an infant's cry, down the sea road there. I'll run and look.

MYRA. I heard nothing.

SHEPHERD BOY. I'm sure of it.

MYRA. Do not delay. If it should be your dark lady, the one you saw and told us of, we all of us will give her assistance. (Shepherd Boy hastens off.) We'll give her fruit to eat and milk to drink, whatever remains of our repast.

CHILDREN. Aye, that we will, dear Myra.

MYRA. And beg that she accompany us homewards. For we must be ever hospitable to the guest and to the wanderer. Never should we close the door rudely in the stranger's face.

A CHILD. Oh Myra, what if she should be our goddess? the goddess whom we are somewhere, sometime to meet, face to face? Maybe we are the fortunate ones!

ANOTHER CHILD. And do not goddesses sometime perform wonders of magic, changing men into animals at will and filling the world with marvelous stories for us to enjoy?

MYRA. Listen, I think they're coming. (Reenter the Shepherd Boy, beckoning on the strangers.)

SHEPHERD BOY. A few steps farther, only a few steps. (Enter Latona, clad in black with her two infants in her arms. A young girl follows her to whom Latona hands the babes. Myra and the children have an impulse to go toward Latona, but something seems to restrain them.)

LATONA. So long the way I know not what to do—
These famish'd babes have nought to suckle on.
I smell the blessed water here! One moment,
Till I can gain my breath, O gentle lad,
And I will thank you for your service done me,
And I will deeply drink from yonder pool,
To nourish once again these infants dear.

MYRA. Oh madam, if perchance we too might aid—

LATONA. My friends, I thank you, but I soon shall be
Refresh'd and strengthen'd by these waters here:
'Twas only my great thirst that weakened me.

SHEPHERD BOY. I must run away again, but I shall soon come back. (Exits. Latona goes to the bank, where she kneels. Just then Neocles and Glaucus reenter, in a bad frame of mind.)

NEOCLES. The game is up, I tell you, and you have made a fool of me. Bion does not mean to come back, or if he does, it will be without the council's consent.

GLAUCUS. Master, I will think hard and tell you a way out, if you will give me another gold-piece. (Looks wistfully into the water.)

NEOCLES. Never, I'm done with you and your plans.

GLAUCUS. If it had not been for me, you'd—Hello, what have we here? A stranger, a traveller? Master, now act out the part as I have pictured it for you, and see if what I said wasn't true.

NEOCLES. What do you mean? What did you say?

GLAUCUS. Be the inn-keeper—own the water—make money! Try it.

NEOCLES. I don't think much of the scheme.

GLAUCUS. It's bound to work—try it!

NEOCLES. (To Latona, roughly) Who are you?

LATONA. A wanderer.

NEOCLES. How many in your party?

LATONA. Two infants, a nurse, and, ah me, myself.

NEOCLES. How long do you wish to stay? Do you come from the sea?

LATONA. O sir, with your permission I will pause to drink of this water. I will then answer your questions as best I may. By your voice you seem to be one in authority.

NEOCLES. I am proprietor here.

MYRA. (Who has been listening.) Do not believe that, dear Lady—its a lie. My father has not returned with the council's consent.

NEOCLES. (To Myra.) What right have you to intrude into my affairs?

LATONA. Sir, I do not mean to be unreasonable. Yet surely you would not hinder me now from drinking of this water—I am faint and tired.

NEOCLES. I have nothing against you personally—but at this time there is a principle involved—a question of right and property. I claim the ownership of this property, and it is my right to prohibit trespassers from approaching it without my consent or without a due monetary consideration, such as satisfies me.

GLAUCUS. That's it, master. Now you're talking!

NEOCLES. What that young woman says (pointing to Myra) is nothing to the point. Granting that the ownership technically may not be mine, I do nevertheless at this moment set up a *de facto* claim. I am here and here I shall remain. It lies with others by superior power or, if they please, through a judicial process in the courts, to enjoin me. I know the virtue of such a claim as I now make. It is not new. It's an old stand-by of mine. I've not been in business all these years for nothing.

LATONA. But sir, I have no money. I am but a poor wanderer who has undergone many misfortunes. I am quite alone in the world, with the exception of my two children—and kind mortals for the most part take pity upon me.

NEOCLES. I am determined to make a test of this question, for various reasons. But why argue the matter? You are free to go on and find what you desire elsewhere, or pay me now and here for the privilege of taking water from this pool. I name twenty drachmas as my figure.

MYRA. Children, has any of you perchance a draught of water in the water-vessels?

NEOCLES. None of that, young woman. You can't defeat me in that way. I advise you not to mix up in this affair.

A CHILD. Can't we go to the water and take a jar-full like we did before? Who'll come with me? (A number press forward.)

NEOCLES. Stand back! The first one of you who attempts to reach this water will wish she had never been born! I call on my parasite here to help me. (Glaucus assumes a militant attitude.)

LATONA. Sir, why do you refuse me water? Water is free to all.

NEOCLES. That is mere theory. Not in this case.

LATONA. Nature has made neither the sun nor air nor the running stream the property of any one.

NEOCLES. The prating of philosophers! Practical men see it otherwise. Nature can be harnessed, they say, and for one I want to be a driver and handle the reins. This argument of yours does not impress me.

GLAUCUS. Master, you are doing famously—you will live in history.

LATONA. To the bounty of Nature I did indeed turn. You appear to see this question differently from the way I see it. Be it so. What I now ask I ask as a favor. I wish only to quench my thirst. A draught of water would be nectar to me, and I would be indebted to you for life itself. Let these infants move your pity, who hold out their little arms for succor.

MYRA. (To Neocles.) For the love of the Gods, how can you be so cruel?

NEOCLES. There you go again. Why need you interfere? (To Latona.) Now that you appeal to the Gods, I have something of a personal nature to say on that subject. I too have ancestral rights and an ancestral history. My family, I am proud to say, is an old and distinguished family and it has just claims to divine descent. And so, I take it, my will to power is well founded.

LATONA. (Turning to her children in the arms of the nurse.) May you, O my children, never have to endure the insults heaped upon the head of your unfortunate mother! (To Neocles.) Insensate man, not any barbarian of the outer world ever could be guilty of more cruel inhospitality than you have shown me. Who then are you, who turn me away coming as a suppliant?

GLAUCUS. Have a care, master, you may have gone too far!

NEOCLES. If so, it was you who set me on. I've had enough of you and your plans. Henceforth shift for yourself. Give me back that gold piece I gave you!

GLAUCUS. (Unnerved.) Oh, master, be not so passionate and so sudden! I have always looked out for your interests. For you I have lost my hard-earned substance. (Gazing into the water.) But softly, master, you are not yet out of danger. You still need my help. It may be my last effort in your behalf. If you are, as you say, and I believe, descended from the Gods, let us find a reason—

LATONA. Cease your babble and hear me. (To Neocles.) For the last time I demand that you yield to me my just right to partake of this common bounty of Nature intended for all.

NEOCLES. (Bumptuously.) And for the last time I say to you that only by my permission may you partake of this water. I care not who you are. Advance at your peril. See, I defy you, since you will it so, by leaping into the water and making it muddy, so that for all your pains, you may not drink of so foul a draught. (He wades in and disturbs the water.)

CHILDREN. Oh! oh! oh!

GLAUCUS. Hold on! What are you doing? Hold on, I say. Stop muddying up the bottom. I want my gold-piece first. Its out there. Do you see it? I see it. No, I don't see it. Confound you, how am I going to get it, if you keep stirring up the mud?

LATONA. Has goodness utterly departed from the Earth? (Looking toward Myra.) No, let me not say that. How the utterances of the Oracle come flooding over my mind. Good and evil? A shepherd-boy! An altar of Deméter, at the crossroads? A test? (To Myra.) Is this an altar of Deméter, at the crossroads?

MYRA. It is indeed.

LATONA. O Oracle, thou spokest truly. Here, here indeed, was I to meet the test. The good and lowly have been my friends. It was left for such a pride-blown,

swollen creature as this, (looking toward Neocles) this blatant, croaking toad, to offer me insults, travestying Nature and disgracing the name of man! Think you that with impunity you may defy the altars of the Gods—with hypocrisy and sneers dishonor the divine deities, uttering sacrilegious words, insolently claiming divine descent, uttering such words before *me*, knowing not who I may be nor who I am? (Both Neocles and Glaucus seem to flatten under the scathing anger of the Goddess. Neocles sinks in the water until only his head is visible. Glaucus is stretched prone on the ground.) You are not fit to associate with men. Foul pools and slimy swales are your natural habitation. To them, then! Go tell your filthy kind that 'twas I, Latona, who thus punished you and sent you thither! (During these words the scene has grown darker and darker. Lightning flashes and thunder rolls. Under the curse of the Goddess Neocles and Glaucus are metamorphosed into Frogs. They disappear and are seen no more. The Children and Myra are awe-struck. A considerable pause. Gradually the scene becomes bright again, as it was before. Enter Shepherd Boy.)

LATONA. (Seeing him.) Ah, my little friend, come to me. Will you not climb up among those rocks, where I see some clear water trickling down and get me a draught? I can endure it no longer.

Shepherd Boy. Indeed I will. (Myra gives him water-jar.) Was there a thunder shower up here? I heard the sound as I came along. What's become of the two men, the big one and the fellow I took for the onion-seller? (Meanwhile he climbs the rock and fills a jar of water, hands it down to Myra, who pours a cupfull for Latona.)

LATONA. (Pausing before she drinks.) Blessed be the father of my children, the King of Heaven, Zeus, who causeth the rain to fall! (Myra and the children drop to their knees and hold out their hands to Latona.)

MYRA. O sovereign Lady, what we have seen today no mortal has ever seen before!

LATONA. Blessed be the King of Heaven, Zeus, who wills that the bounties of Nature shall be for the use of all! (A sound is heard from the water, like ga-ung!, ga-ung!)

SHEPHERD BOY. Frogs! Let me in to catch them!

LATONA. No. Let them remain where they are. Even now again do they exercise their offensive tongues in strife.

MYRA. O Goddess, we will bring offerings to our altar in honor of thy name.

LATONA. For aye remember'd shall your goodness be, O pretty children, and thou, noble maid.

I may not linger here, for I must on.

Interminable seem my wanderings, yet

A blessed day is coming for my babes

And me, returning honor'd to my home.

If ever in the future poets sing

Of woes unjustly borne and storied wrongs,

Then let them me remember. Cruel Juno

Forth from the radiant wooing of my lord
 Drove me, the trembling love of sovereign Zeus,
 Drove me with threats to wander forth alone,
 In misery to turn I knew not where.
 Ah me, how mighty was her will and power,
 Like to the savage wind-storm! On and on
 Alone and wretched I have dragg'd me on
 From place to place as best I could, when lo,
 I came to flowery Delos, where anon
 These lovely offspring of our love were born—
 Who came like to a message from my lord
 To tell me I again should welcom'd be
 And be forgiven for my fault of love,
 What time the Queen of Heaven were satisfied.
 To me myself I care not what may come—
 To dangers I am used. But an immortal light
 Enfolds my beauteous babes and Heaven itself
 Smiles down in wonder as they sleep—
 They come to light the world!
 (A murmur of admiration rises from the children and Myra.)

I needs must hope
 That soon the palace-gates of their great Father
 Will ope with proud rejoicing to receive them.
 Now from so poor and ignorant a woman
 As 'een I am hear words of joyful import.
 What you have seen today will be a tale
 That ever poets will delight to tell—
 The tale of how Latona haply brought
 A fundamental lesson to mankind,
 A lesson reason'd by the primal Powers:
 That your fair Earth must not sequester'd be
 By cozening louts and wolves and greedy tricksters,
 To the undoing of all others, but that they
 Who this bright jewel of the universe
 By providence of th' immortal Gods inhabit
 Shall equal right and privilege have to use
 The natural gifts of bounteous Earth and Heaven,
 The fertile soil, the air, the sunlight warm,
 The water, wind and fire, that with these aids
 Secure the sons of men may lay their heads,
 And without let or hindrance live their lives,
 And without killing labor live their lives!
 And I would have this precious story live
 Through all the ages to the bounds of time.
 Oh happy chance, dear friends, that it is we
 Of whom this wondrous legend will be told!
 So are the Oracle's pious words fulfilled.
 And now my tasks accomplished, I dare hope
 Heaven's crystal threshold once again awaits me.
 Farewell, sweet maid. Dear Shepherd boy, I pray thee
 Direct me once again the proper road,
 This time down toward the sea. I turn from Lycia
 And homeward thro the Grecian Islands sail,

Past Delos, to the purple Attic shore,
 Whence on to bright Olympus and my Lord!
 (Latona takes her two children from the arms of the nurse
 and turns to go. The Shepherd boy leads the way. Myra
 and the children remain on their knees, with arms still
 extended toward her.)

The Curtain falls.

END OF ACT II

The Play to be concluded with an Epilogue

Laziness, Indifference or Cowardice?

WHY is it that the sound and self-evident proposition,
 that the values given to land by growth of popula-
 tion and increase of public services should be taken by taxa-
 tion for the benefit of those whose activities create them,
 makes such slow progress toward general acceptance?
 Are the people in general unable to understand this proposi-
 tion? Does the selfish interest of a comparatively few
 persons who hope to make a profit by speculating in land
 outweigh the manifest advantages of abolishing taxes on
 industry, and deriving public revenues from values created
 by the community as a whole? That the principle of tax-
 ing land value is sound economics and in accord with the
 fundamentals of true ethics, as establishing a just basis
 for organized society, cannot successfully be controverted.
 Then why is it that it is not universally recognized?

The answer to these questions is chiefly to be found in
 the indifference of the great mass of mankind toward new
 ideas, but there is also the deplorable fact that of those
 who see the truth of the doctrine so clearly enunciated by
 Henry George a large percentage do nothing toward
 securing its general adoption. Yes, they are Single Taxers,
 possibly they have been for a long time, but—they have
 grown tired in trying to convert their stupid acquaintances
 and think it a useless waste of effort to talk about the land
 as related to all important social problems. Speaking
 from my own experience, I must frankly admit that the
 hopeless stupidity of so many of those whom I had re-
 garded as favorable prospects for conversion to the truth
 of "the land for the people" has at times depressed and
 discouraged me, and I have been inclined to fall back on
 the old query: "What's the use?" Then, again, there
 is the recognition of the futility of effort that comes from
 finding many of those who seemed to have grasped a clear
 understanding of the land question, with its central truth
 of freedom as the goal of human endeavor, going off in
 support of anti-libertarian notions of paternalism, social-
 ism, governmentalism, impertinent meddling with the
 affairs of foreign peoples, and all sorts of fads and isms,
 wholly incompatible with the philosophy of free land and
 free men. This, however, is no excuse for evading the duty
 of trying to make plain to others the truths clearly per-
 ceived. I do not offer this explanation as an excuse, but