

PROLOGUE: August Prince, great glory of the world! Genesisius was ill, but having recovered his health through the Christian sacred rites, he will appear upon this stage. Favor us with your attention! [*As the curtain opens GENESIUS, playing himself, lies on a couch.*] Is Genesisius ill? What malady is ailing you?

GENESIUS: My belly that I have built up to a lofty mass of flesh. Weighed down by this vast burden, like a giant imprisoned beneath Mount Etna, I toss and turn, poor wretch. No sleep refreshes my eyes; no welcome rest relaxes my mind. Who is there with sufficient power of healing skill to lighten this monstrous mountain of my paunch?

PROLOGUE: Implore the gods, tire Jupiter with your prayers. He'll grant the aid that you desire. He'll shrink that huge mountain ridge of fat.

GENESIUS: [*praying with uplifted hands*] Father of the gods, and you divinities of the starlit courts, bring healing. Genesisius lies here buried in himself. His paunch has grown into a hill. A mound crammed tight with guts holds him oppressed. Destroy this massy weight. Let the swelling subside toward level ground. Lay low this Appennine. Let health rush back to me again.

MERCURY: [*descending in a cloud*] See, sent from heaven's starry citadel I bear you Father Jove's commands. Come, dispel the worry gnawing on your heart. Sure ending for your ills is hurrying from Olympus. A puffball fungus, cousin to your belly, will collapse into small dimensions. The health you crave will return to you. Swelling will leave your inflated body and confined once more within its proper limits, it will regain its former comeliness. Meanwhile let Slumber unfold his wings that drip with dew, and flitting above you may he close your eyes with gentle stealth. [*Here MERCURY touches GENESIUS's eyes with his staff.*] Come, pleasant relaxation. Come, Slumber, tamer of troubles, and grasp the tip of this wand entwined with serpents. Creep from it into the wearied limbs and eyes. Let soothing rest embrace Genesisius. Let your wings not bear you back to your Cimmerian shores until proper dimensions restrict this belly. [*GENESIUS falls asleep.*] Come here now, you who have won fame throughout the centuries for your knowledge of the powers of herbs and your excellence in the healing arts. Whether you dwell in the sky in the company of the gods or whether the pleasant glades of Elysium hold you, whatever be the region of either world that you inhabit, present yourselves straightway. Jove's command bids you come. [*Actors representing APOLLO, AESCULAPIUS, MACHAON, PAEON, CHIRON, and MELAMPUS enter in pairs, dancing.*] Here Phoebus

Apollo, discoverer of the medical arts, leads the chorus together with Apollo's son, whose name derives from the esculent oak. Next strides forth Machaon, an equal of his grandfather and father who preceded him. He is accompanied by Paeon. Last come a pair, Chiron with his companion Melampus. By order of the Thunderer, come, first encourage Genesisius's spirits. Let earth resound with the beat of your dancing feet. Let the lyre, struck by the plectrum, yield music to animate the dance.

[*An interval of dancing and music ensues.*]

MERCURY: Now our anxiety demands other measures. Enough time has been given to your dance. The patient must be cured.

APOLLO: [*approaching GENESIUS*] Tell me, what trouble vexes you?

GENESIUS: Gods of healing, just look at me! This hump is swollen out a foot and a half in front of me. I carry a monstrous weight, a huge sausage filled with guts. [*He points to a wide-topped wooden prop beside his couch.*] I am compelled to support the troublesome mass with this crutch. If only some god would lighten it and make me graceful once more, the blubber swept away!

APOLLO: Let toil diminish your belly with unremitting work.

AESCULAPIUS: Add hunger to your toil. Nothing shrinks the swollen mass of the belly more quickly than dieting and fasting.

MACHAON: Let thirst also be a constant comrade to your fasting.

PAEON: You must drink water from a limpid spring, but in moderation.

CHIRON: Sedulously avoid letting a single drop of wine touch your thirsting palate.

MELAMPUS: Measure out your sleep. Spend nights in wakefulness. Do not let deep slumber, death's image, overwhelm you. Under this treatment health is sure to return one day.

APOLLO: That great gulf will dry up when moisture has been long denied to it.

AESCULAPIUS: Deprived of nourishment, that paunch will fade away.

GENESIUS: Is this truly the remedy for my sufferings? Unending toil, thirst and hunger, water from a clear spring, and Bacchus chased away? Long sleepless nights? Are you the founders of this craft, famed for your healing powers? Are you heroes from the land of Elysium? Are you gods from the citadel of the skies? No, rather you are specters from hell's river Phlegethon! Off with you, far off to your Stygian dwellings! [*GENESIUS leaps from his bed and hurls his*

*crutch at them.*] Depart, you ghosts from the realm of the Furies! Take your medical skill to Pluto, Jove of the underworld. [*The troupe of gods and heroes leaves in a rush.*] Let a fasting belly nourish shades and ghosts! A different hope shines upon me. A greater god promises longed-for healing. The sacred rites of the Christians will grant me my desire and restore me to my former self. What priest will wash away with life-giving water the congealed sins of my life? [*He falls on his knees and raises eyes and hands to heaven.*] God of the Christians, I stretch out my hands in pleading prayer. If what I ask is just, send me one who will sprinkle my head with the holy water. I am yours, though all the gods whom the blind race of Remus worships roar their disapproval. I am a recruit to Christ. [*One of the troupe enters, dressed in surplice and stole, pretending to be a Christian priest.*]

PRIEST: My son, what you ask of God with earnest prayer, that Christ freely grants you.

GENESIUS: Good father, pray and sprinkle the water I have long wanted. This is the sum of my prayers: that I be added to Christ's flock.

PRIEST: Do you believe in God the Son, coeternal with the Father, God born of the supreme God, and the God equal to them both, who burns with everlasting love?

GENESIUS: I believe whatever stands hidden beneath every page of the secret law.

PRIEST: Do you forswear the gods and goddesses of the Latin race?

GENESIUS: I do forswear them.

PRIEST: Are you ashamed of your life so burdened with numerous sins, and do you detest it?

GENESIUS: Yes, I am ashamed and detest it. Tremendous sorrow for my sins burns my spirit and strikes my heart with repeated blows. [*He beats his breast and weeps.*] Father, give me the water that brings salvation. Prostrate on my knees I beg for that heavenly rain.

PRIEST: Since you make request, being eager for eternal salvation, I baptize you. [*He splashes copious water upon GENESIUS's head and into his face.*] I drench you all over with the joyous dew of the waters. [*Two angels suddenly appear and stand on either side of GENESIUS, visible to him alone. From a cloud a hand stretches forth above his head.*]

GENESIUS: I am terror-stricken! My courage has vanished. The cloud extends a hand! On each side of me stands a boy with starbright face. Where am I?

FIRST ANGEL: [*displaying a book filled with black marks*] Here you see the deeds of accursed Genesisus. Every page is blackened. But because of your genuine sorrow of soul, God has forgiven your sins.

SECOND ANGEL: This water, even though it was sprinkled in mocking pretense, has washed away all the foulness of your impure heart. [*The first angel once more opens the same book and discloses that the black smudges have been expunged.*] This book bears witness, turned into snowy brightness. Not a trace of black remains. Its pages sparkle pure and clean. Therefore go happily on your way. The palm of victory awaits you in your struggle.

PRIEST: Why are you standing there with gaping mouth? Haven't we poured enough water on your face? [*He tries to pour more, but GENESIUS prevents him, speaking very seriously now.*]

GENESIUS: Restrain your sacrilegious hand, priest of hell! Up until now I have been a vicious scoffer. I acted out the Christian rites as a joke for Rome's amusement. My wit made sport of Christ, my faces mocked him. Now it is high time to lay aside this damnable playacting. Genesisus is called to play a different role. A better God has taken possession of my heart. Forgive me, Caesar. I have rejected Jove. I have abandoned the gods. Christ now carries me off as his own. I am a Christian!

DIOCLETIAN: What! Are you trying to pull Caesar onto your stage? Comedian, stick with your own rabble!

GENESIUS: Enough of comedy. Serious matters are my sole concern. Stage of the sons of Romulus, farewell. I am a Christian.

DIOCLETIAN: Are you seeking to mock Augustus with your joking?

GENESIUS: Here I put an end to my playacting for your amusement. To this theater I testify: It is a fact that I am a Christian. It is a fact that Christ, by his secret warning, gave me the chance to be a Christian. Converted to Christ's flock I am drawn to Christ with all my heart. From this resolve nothing shall make me swerve: not bribery, not the favor of monarchs, not violence or threats, not even a long-drawn-out death in cruel torment. Though there hang over my head every kind of evil that savagery can invent, still I am a Christian.

DIOCLETIAN: Is an actual frenzy driving the man insane, or is he still acting out his comedies with his former cleverness?

VITUS: Augustus, he has turned to seriousness. Suddenly he is converted to our side. This is the living force of our Christian law. Whether hearts be hard or repugnant or impenetrable, God can

conquer them in even one single moment.

GENESIUS: If words cannot win belief, then deeds must do it. [*He picks up a statue of Venus and prepares to hurl it to the ground.*] Greek harlot, ruin of the earth, down with you! Down, foul courtesan!

DIOCLETIAN: What a crime! [*He rushes on stage and aims a blow at GENESIUS with his staff.*] What a horrible crime! Die, accursed man! [*But DIOCLETIAN's blow misses GENESIUS and knocks off Venus's head.*]

GENESIUS: Look! His fury, impelled into blind attack, has smashed off the head of incestuous Venus. [*He hurls the head to the floor.*] Fall headlong and strike the earth that you defile!

DIOCLETIAN: My heart is swelling with rage. Some god is driving me into fury. With my cruel teeth I shall tear a tiger to pieces. How has Genesis' trickery defiled my weapon with impiety? How has that impudent dragon made me the executioner of the goddess to whom Rome owes her scepter and her universal glory? What a monstrous deed! Go, captain of the guard, bind that culprit with a hundred chains. Let a frightful prison hold him fast. Meanwhile I shall ponder what devices and torments of violent death I shall employ to force him to vomit forth his life.

GENESIUS: Caesar, you have made me happy. I gladly go on my way.

VITUS: You will be even happier when you approach the goal of the journey you have begun. [*GENESIUS is dragged off.*]

URBANUS: Caesar, permit me to utter a few truths. I confess it was a monstrous, foul, disgusting, hellish crime that was committed. There with smashed head lies the goddess who is the mother of the race of Romulus and protectress of the world. The majesty of Latin Jove has been dishonored. Rome has been mocked. Nevertheless, no guilt for this deed stains Genesis. The insanity of a disturbed mind was breathed into him by magic craft. That is what drove him to the act, even against his will. Do you seek the contriver of the trick? He stands close by, and unless you are cautious he will cause an equal frenzy to possess you, Caesar. There he is, the one who bears the guilt of this great crime. There is the one who with the contagion and enchantment of his deadly voice stole away the comic actor for Christ. Let Rome blame Vitus for Genesis's desertion.

DIOCLETIAN: Where and when did the lad pour forth enchantment and contagion?

URBANUS: Time or opportunity is never lacking for shameful deeds. Augustus, the stage had scarcely presented Genesis before us when Vitus began to mumble and hum the melodies of his magic

spells. From this very spot, glaring with grim eyes, he struck the actor. I saw it there. I saw Genesis displaying on his face the signs of a lost mind.

PULCHERELLUS: We also observed that as soon as he had absorbed the fire from those evil eyes the man fainted away.

OTHO: I too bear witness that the magician by glance and incantation stole away from this city her festive comedies. By means of the evil eye he disturbed the balance of Genesis's mind.

DIOCLETIAN: Why do you prattle such falsehoods? With his dear eyes could this boy hurl poisoned weapons? With this mouth could he weave Circe's enchantments? With these lips could he scatter poison far and wide? His beauty proves you liars, yes, and his youth as well, which is incapable of such shameful deeds. Beneath this fair face lies hidden even fairer character.

PULCHERELLUS: [*aside*] This Thracian barbarian, still captivated, is mad with love for Vitus.

URBANUS: Caesar, neither handsome face nor tender age exempts a Hebrew youth. He drinks in contagion mingled with the milk from his mother's breast. And when the years have strengthened him in young manhood, he absorbs all the arcane plagues that witch Medea teaches. From earliest years he dares to make supreme test of his craft upon the race of Remus. Just observe him closely. Does not poison lurk beneath those eyes at which you stare so fixedly? These cheeks, this brow are breathing out our ruin. This hair, plaited in magic knots, will overthrow the family of Trojan Assaracus.

VITUS: Princes, beware the omen! Vergil sang: "Long ago Jove granted imperial sway without limit." And yet you claim that this empire hangs from the tresses of my head and that my hair alone suspends the fate of Rome. Now if the chief priest spoke truth, then the Father of gods and men was wrong, deceived by my hair. But if the chief priest spoke falsehood, then learn all the methods of his wickedness from this one blunder, Caesar.

DIOCLETIAN: You reason cleverly. You argue your case to a successful close. The welfare of the eternal city does not hang suspended from those threads of your hair. Do you wish to know around what pole the empire circles, what power makes Rome perennial? [*DIOCLETIAN opens the door of the lararium, the chapel in which the protective gods' statues were kept in a Roman household.*] Vitus, come into the inner shrine of the gods with me. Household gods, open wide your home. Look, here is the hope of the Latin race. These tutelary gods

protect Rome and us. Relying on these gods the great empire of our Trojan lineage is unending.

VITUS: Cease, my prince. Error leads you astray. Come now, you Penates. If Rome is truly protected by your power, then stand firmly in your place. But if damnable error has formed and shaped you gods, and if one single Divinity presides over human affairs, then at Christ's command fall headlong! [*The idols crash to the ground.*] They are fallen! Look at the hopes of the Latin race! See, the protective gods of the empire have fallen prostrate. Has the realm stood fast and grown by reliance on these leaders? Is it likely that he makes firm another's stance who has fallen from his own? Go now, Caesar, and pledge your faith in these divinities of yours!

URBANUS: Have I been a true prophet, Caesar, or a false one? Ruling Rome's fortunes lie defeated. In the fall of the gods the whole empire has collapsed.

DIOCLETIAN: Monstrous deed! It is the horrendous crime of a magician. He has knocked down the Penates of our empire, a sin that can never be atoned sufficiently, even in hell! Lictor, come here. Lay violent hands upon him. Snatch the wretch away, sink him in a hellish dungeon. Mangle his back with rods, his belly with iron claws, his flanks with scourges. Turn all of him into wounds, and let that monster be reddened with a single clot of gore from head to foot.

VITUS: Stripped of your stratagems, now you are playing your own true role. Wild beast, you are returning now to the fury that was in-born in your heart. Diocletian, with deception laid aside, you please me!