

Sympathy for the Devil

by
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Dramatis Personae

Artemis. . . late-teens
Hyacinth. . . late-teens

The play takes place in a quiet corner of a large fortress in the center of a beseiged city.

[A green, quiet corner in the center
of an urban fort.

Artemis lies motionless on a bench. He
wears dirty, torn, clothing. A satchel
lays on the ground near his head.

Hyacinth, wearing cast-off clothing that
give him the appearance of a dandy,
enters. He stands near Artemis' feet.

Hyacinth coughs. Artemis does not
respond. Hyacinth coughs, again. Still,
from Artemis, no response. Hyacinth
slaps Artemis on the soles of his shoes.
Artemis springs up; jumps from the bench;
crouches, dog-like, behind the bench.

After a moment, Artemis peers around the
bench.]

ARTEMIS
Hyacinth?

HYACINTH
'Tis I.

ARTEMIS
Are you alone?

[Hyacinth nods his head "Yes."]

ARTEMIS
In truth?

HYACINTH
I promise you, as far as hawks can see
of Mendor's men I am the only one.

ARTEMIS
You come as friend or foe?

HYACINTH
You think me foe?
Your loyal Hyacinth--

ARTEMIS
Loyal no more.
You've turned your back on everything you know;
your home, your land, on those who hold you in
their heart more dear than kin. How can you stake
a claim to loyalty?

HYACINTH

Your uncle thinks
me friend. He is a wise and skillful man.
His writ gave me safe passage through the troops
that guard this citadel. Why would such man
as he, Prime Minister for nearly twenty years,
send for me if he thought I was your foe?

ARTEMIS

Old men, sometimes, live too much in the past.
Remembering gentle days they turn to fools.

HYACINTH

You'd call him fool if he were standing here?

ARTEMIS

And for my uncle's grace you thank me how?
With blows upon my feet?

HYACINTH

That was a joke.
To recollect those youthful, carefree days
when we would brawl for vict'ry on the field.

ARTEMIS

Poor joke, it seems to me.
What if, upon the shock of waking thus,
I misconstrued your joke as an assault
and, thinking my life was in jeopardy,
I had attacked?

HYACINTH

You do not have the pluck.

ARTEMIS

Within the heart of every breathing man
there lives the dreadful possibility--

HYACINTH

A warrior? You?

[Artemis, feeling the sting of Hyacinth's
insinuation, stiffens. Hyacinth,
registering Artemis' change, readies
himself for an attack. The men eye each
other; each ready to spring into battle.

After a moment,]

HYACINTH

Besides, I think you feigned.

ARTEMIS

Why would I feign?

HYACINTH

Why would you sleep at such a time as this?

[Artemis smiles. He reaches for his satchel.]

ARTEMIS

My uncle's cook, remembering what you like, sends duck and sausage made into confit.

HYACINTH

I have of late adopted Mendor's way and have forsworn consuming any meat.

ARTEMIS

That is exactly what I mean. You take upon yourself the rebel's law--

HYACINTH

Rebel to you. To others, hero.

[Realizing the gulf that separates them, the men are silent. Hyacinth, hearing the silence, relishes it.]

HYACINTH

Dear Artemis, 'tis months since I have heard such silence. Marching. Swearing. Fighting night and day and day and night. That is my life. Whatever tales the gossip-mongers weave: the joy, they say, we take in killing men; the joy, they say, we take to die ourselves as if we are but devils loosed from hell; I tell you this; it's all a lie. They lie to keep you scared. We long for peace. We fight because we must. Because of truth. And now, in truth, I say to you, old friend, my fancy dress belies an awful fact; we have no food. We live on berries, barks, and stews from grass. I long to eat.

ARTEMIS

You say, however, that you'll have no meat. I scarce have fruit--

HYACINTH

Have you not heard a word I said? I'm starved. Whate're you have I'll eat.

[Much to their surprise, they laugh. They move, cautiously, to sit on the bench. Artemis pulls food from his satchel.]

ARTEMIS

There's cheese. And bread. The confit, which I'll have.

[They lean together and, appearing to examine food, have a hurried, secret conversation.]

ARTEMIS

We're being watched.

HYACINTH

I know.

ARTEMIS

My uncle's men--

HYACINTH

Are there behind the rocks.

ARTEMIS

One suspect move
from either one of us-- [Full voice.] Ah! Here are figs!

[Artemis hands Hyacinth the figs. The men, making a bit of a show, eat. Returning to full voice.]

HYACINTH

I do not understand your hesitance
to sing the praises of this splendid feast.
I think you must have used some wizardry
to bring together such magnificence.
The Spartan life we live inside our camps
makes feasting thus a ghostly memory.

[They eat. Then, as if remembering
something that had slipped his mind,]

HYACINTH

I have the papers that your uncle wants.

[He pulls a small packet of papers, bound
by ribbon, from his coat pocket and hands
them to Artemis.]

HYACINTH

I witnessed Mendor signing them myself.

ARTEMIS

Thank you. There are no words to say how much
my uncle and the other men of state
hunger for the news this packet brings.
Mendor sends word that he has changed his mind
and will, he says, accept our plea for peace
and everyone is suddenly convinced
the rebel should be taken at his word.
Why?
Why is he, now, a man that we must trust
when, up to now, everything he has done
was done to bring ruin upon our heads?

HYACINTH

That is too harsh.

ARTEMIS

His troops surround our walls.

HYACINTH

He wants to help you find the better way.
There is a better way--

ARTEMIS

I know. I've heard.

HYACINTH

You sneer. I understand.

ARTEMIS

He wants us dead.
You cannot look me in the eye and say
that I am wrong. Or that I stretch the truth.

[Artemis looks Hyacinth in the eyes.
Artemis breaks his gaze and begins
untying the ribbon binding the papers.]

HYACINTH

Do not do that.

ARTEMIS

Do what?

HYACINTH

Do not untie--
The letter's not for you. It's for the men
who have the pow'r to end this fight. Do not--

[Artemis reads the letter.]

HYACINTH

You compromise the offer Mendor makes.
Give me the packet. Let me tie it up.
Perhaps no one will know.

ARTEMIS

What's this?

HYACINTH

What's what?

ARTEMIS

This other page. These several here--

HYACINTH

I do

not know. Give it to me!

ARTEMIS

These several here
are what one would expect. A sweeping list
of what Mendor demands for calling off
his troops. "I must have this. You must do that."
But this--

HYACINTH

Be careful, friend.

ARTEMIS

This other page
not in his hand. It seems to be a plan;
a diagram with names, and numbers, towns,
and dates. A forecast for the movement of
his troops. [To himself.] What have I done? [Looking up.]
You have a knife!
My uncle's men will take you down.

HYACINTH

You think
I care about those soldiers there? You think
I have not thought this action through and seen
the end and what it holds for me; the one
who betrays Mendor's righteous cause? Be sure
your uncle sees that right away. He'll learn
from what it says how best to win this war.

[Hyacinth moves as if to leave.]

ARTEMIS

But why? You've struggled for so long. You've fought
beside Mendor throughout this war. You gave
up everything to fight his fight. And now,
when it is clear that we no longer have

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

the strength of will we need to carry on,
and Mendor will soon have his victory,
you give him up?
It makes no sense.

HYACINTH

You're right. For many years I thought his way
was for the best. But fighting for so long
has made him hard. His heart is full of hate.
The peace he offers you is just a trick.
A Trojan horse. . .

[Hyacinth feels a pain in his
gut.]

When all is calm, and you have put aside
your last defense he'll give the call. His men
will rise, take up their secret arms, and then
the final slaughter will begin.

I will not let him be a hypocrite.

I'd rather he was dead--

[Another, stronger pain in his gut.]

I need to go.

ARTEMIS

Stay.

HYACINTH

No. If I go now
I've time to make it to a secret place
before Mendor discovers what I've done.

[A strong pain stops Hyacinth in his
tracks.]

ARTEMIS

Give me your hand.

HYACINTH

I must--

[Hyacinth tries to hide the pain, but it
is more than he can bear.]

ARTEMIS

Sit for a while.

[Artemis helps sit on the bench.]

ARTEMIS

You speak about the hate in Mendor's heart;
the rage within my uncle's knows no bounds.
To know that you, the lonely boy he raised
as if you were his son, show'ring such love

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

on you, that oftentimes my childish spleen
conceived a foolish wish that you were dead,
to know that you are Mendor's right-hand man,
is more than he can bear. How could we know
that you would bring these secret plans? The figs--

[Another, more violent pain grabs hold of
Hyacinth.]

HYACINTH

These sudden pains--

ARTEMIS

I know. I'll make this short.
The figs you thought conceived through wizardry. . .
My uncle had them steeped in special charms,
the said effect of which you're feeling now.

HYACINTH

I do not understand.

ARTEMIS

His sweet revenge.
There is no antidote.

HYACINTH

He wants me dead?

[Hyacinth, finding his answer in Artemis'
eyes, tries to stand. He makes it part
way up; then collapses.]

ARTEMIS

If we had known what you would do. . .
You should not hold me blameless in this plot.
I said, "My uncle's plan." And, yet, my heart. . .
My mind o'ertook my heart and I agreed.
I'll go. That must be what you want. How can
you bear the sight of a false-friend? And yet,
perhaps a hand. . . To die holding a hand
is better than alone. My hand? Once friend?

[Artemis offers his hand. Hyacinth takes
it. They sit, waiting.]

ARTEMIS

It vexes me the poison is so slow.

END OF PLAY