

NORMA

VINCENZO BELLINI

Libretto by FELICE ROMANI

**English Version
by Donald Pippin**

INTRODUCTION

We are in a small, occupied country in Northern Europe, a land seething with resentment and hatred of the conquering oppressor, where fear prevails and public meetings can be attempted only under cover of night; a place where seeds of revolt are on the verge of sprouting.

This powerful, incendiary opera was composed at a time when Italy also was a country fragmented, carved up between foreign superpowers that ruled with an iron fist and held strong views on what was permissible for the public to be exposed to. Highly sensitive – if that’s the right word -- about the possible spread of dangerous ideas, they took opera very seriously. Not daring to suppress it altogether, which would certainly have started a national revolution, they fell back on an alternative: make it *irrelevant*, by camouflaging the plots that hit too close to home and by setting them in far away times and remote locales -- like Boston. True to form, the story of Norma is relegated to the misty land of the druids, occupied by Rome at the height of its power, about two thousand years ago. But don’t be fooled. The story is appallingly universal, then and now. Greece, Poland, Ethiopia, Peru, Tibet -- take your pick. The list goes on and on. Whether it’s the first century, the 16th or the 21st, the tragic story is repeated over and over, with few adjustments needed.

The atmosphere is tense on both sides. The invading army, well armed but vastly outnumbered, moves guardedly -- strangers in a hostile land, ever on the alert for a surprise attack. The natives, even more circumspect, are driven underground, their weapons limited mainly to stones and pitchforks. Still chafing under the humiliation of defeat, hungry for freedom, they strain at the leash, ferociously determined to cast off the onerous yoke.

This dangerous ferment is held tenuously in check by Norma, a revered, awe-inspiring woman, a leader on whom they depend for strength and guidance, despite the unpalatable message that she continues to insist on: be patient, do nothing. The enemy will collapse under its own weight.

Only a leader of unquestionable integrity could get away with such an unpopular decree -- only a person of Norma's stature. High priestess of an austere religious order whose vows include that of chastity, she is the last person they would suspect of leading a double life -- a secret life that fatally compromises everything that she is presumed to stand for. The last person they would suspect, in short, of high treason.

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

Scene: The sacred forest of the Druids. It is night. Far away fires are seen through the trees.

OROVESO: Head for the hillside, you warriors!
 There to await the moment
 When, veiled in a mist of modesty,
 The crescent moon emerges.

 When first the pale horizon,
 Past virgin forest and river,
 Displays a crown of silver,
 Three times will sound the sacred gong,
 Signal of ancient rites.

CHORUS OF DRUIDS: Then our divine interpreter,
 Norma, will come.

OROVESO: Then my daughter Norma will appear,
 And speak.

CHORUS: To point the way!

 Then may she lead the battle cry:
 Death to the hated foreigner!
 Cast off the yoke of tyranny;
 Drive out the vile invader.

 Sunk in the mire of lethargy,
 Too long have we delayed.

OROVESO: She will relay the Gods' command.
 Spurred by the love of liberty,
 We shall reclaim our fatherland,
 Taken by the oppressors.

Then with a cry of bloody war
Lost native pride we shall restore.

CHORUS: Sweet is the taste of victory!
The Gods will be obeyed.

Wait till the moon adorns the night;
Norma will then appear.
We'll gather by moonlight!

Exeunt

POLLIONE and FLAVIO, Romans both, enter.

POLLIONE: Safe for the moment!
Through dark and dismal forest
Our path is clear.

FLAVIO: Around us death is lurking;
Be warned by Norma.

POLLIONE: The name that you have spoken
Turns blood to ice.

FLAVIO: How can it be?
Your angel, the mother of your children?

POLLIONE: There's no reproach that you can offer
I've not said already.
Gone is the former magic;
Past fire of love
Has burnt to ashes.
Extinguished,
No prodding can revive it.
I know the chasm,
The depths unfathomed
Where headlong I have fallen . . .

FLAVIO: Have you found someone else?

POLLIONE: Say it in whispers!
There's someone, yes! Adalgisa!
Who could resist her?
Sweet as the budding flower
Or the dew on the rose.
A priestess, serving the god of these barbarians,

Shining above them
Like a pure ray of starlight
Through storm and tempest.

FLAVIO: Seeds of disaster!
Does she share the same illusions?

POLLIONE: Wonder of wonders! . . .

FLAVIO: You fear not the jealous wrath of Norma?

POLLIONE: The tiger is tamer!
A recent dream
Betrays my guilty conscience.
A nightmare!

FLAVIO: Let's hear it.

POLLIONE: Even recalling, I tremble.

**Silent before the altar,
Adalgisa knelt beside me,
Clad in a gown of virgin white,
Crowned with a wreath of roses.**

**Sounds of celestial harmony
Flooded the fragrant atmosphere.
Dazzled, we were in heaven,
The ascending journey nearly over.
Dazzled, we were in heaven,
The ascending journey, our journey nearly done.
Breaking the spell of ecstasy,
Suddenly black shadow fell between us.
Steeped in the blood of ritual,
Blankets of red enfolded her.**

**Straight from the altar came a flash,
Followed by rolling thunder;
Wintry and bleak, the scene became
Dark as the day of doom.**

**Gone like a dream, my bride-to-be
Breathed by my side no longer.
Searching, I heard a broken sob
Mingled with cries of children.**

**Then came a voice implacable
That echoed through the temple:
Norma repays the traitor
Whose love has turned untrue.**

The sacred gong sounds, followed by a fanfare.

FLAVIO: Fanfare! Norma comes to give the word.
From the temple her gods have spoken.

CHORUS: (*within*) Over the pine the moon appears,
Goddess serene and sacred.

FLAVIO: Follow!

POLLIONE: Leave me . . .

FLAVIO: Heed a warning.

CHORUS: Our sacred goddess . . .

POLLIONE: Savages! With their pagan rites!

FLAVIO: Come on! Let's get away!
Delay could lead to death.

POLLIONE: Uncivilized, these savages
Rely on childish omens.

FLAVIO: Be careful! They come . . .
Delay could lead to death.

CHORUS: Now comes the word from Norma.

POLLIONE: They advance to no avail.
From their fangs am I defended.
Straight ahead, I go attended
By love, the god that I adore.

From the mob of angry natives
I shall seek no retreat, no shelter;
And upon their pagan altar,
Upon their altar
I shall wage eternal war. (*Exeunt*)

NORMA enters, with chorus.

NORMA:

Rumble of revolution!
Warfare and bloodshed!
Who so high and mighty
Thus defies the will of God?

Who dares to question
The higher wisdom clearly relayed by Norma?
None can hasten or delay
Release from the Romans.
By the will of heaven
Is it determined,
Not by earthly power.

Upon the scroll of fortune
The fall of the proud invader
Is printed plainly.
Rome is bound for defeat,
But not by you.

Consumed by inner weakness,
On its own it will fall.

Await then with patience
That fatal hour
Divinely predetermined.

Pray in the meantime;
Our silent goddess will listen.

**Cast a halo, gliding calmly,
O pale Queen of Heaven.
Dress with silver
These ancestral groves
Of myrtle, pine and cedar.**

**From the region
Of tranquil order,
Turn upon us rays of peaceful light and splendor,
Light and splendor;
Cast aside the somber veil.
Rend the veil,
Oh, rend the veil!**

Tame our fever!

**Tame the fever of earthly rebellion.
Spread thy glory
Over waters
Tossed by storm and angry tempest.
Guard forever
That fragile flower;
Render peace, that perfect peace that reigns above,
That reigns above.**

Go in quiet;
The gods have spoken.
Be resigned; obey their orders.
When the time comes
To explode in rage and riot,
I shall spur you on to glory.
From the altar of the temple
I shall raise the cry of war.

CHORUS: Later! The foe will feel our fury!
Let them perish
Without compunction!
And the leader of them all
Will be the scoundrel first to fall.

NORMA: (To fall! . . . I have the power . . .
But . . . to use it?
It tears me apart . . .

If only I could recover
The love that delights no longer,
To death I would shield my lover
Though all the world oppose.

No less than life I'd offer
If I could but recapture
The golden days of rapture
That love alone bestows.

CHORUS: Oh, may we live to see the day
The hated foe is far away.

NORMA: Oh, come to me again as before,
When I gave my heart,
When I gave my heart forevermore. (*Exeunt*)

ADALGISA enters.

ADALGISA: Silence again takes over;
All have disbanded.
Unobserved, I'll sigh,
Concealed in shadow.

Here . . . where I first encountered
The sudden passion
I have tried to conquer,
That has made me forgetful
Of honor, of duty --
Yes, of vows made to God!

Futile the struggle!
A force beyond my power
Drives unrelenting.
On him, his face, his features,
My heart is nourished;
I hunger for his voice.
Even the breezes
Whisper love and longing.

God, oh lead me from temptation.
Ah, watch over me, take care of me!
Oh, father, watch over me!
Forsake not
A lost, homeless child.
Oh, father!
Oh, leave me not to wander;
Save a lost, homeless child.

POLLIONE enters, with FLAVIO.

POLLIONE: *(to Flavio)* There she is! Go!
I'll listen no more to reason. *(Exit Flavio)*

ADALGISA: Oh! You're alone?

POLLIONE: My darling! Your eyes are wet?

ADALGISA: I was praying.
Oh, sir, I'm so afraid!
Be kind, and leave me
To pray for guidance.

POLLIONE: The god you turn to
 Is cruel, oppressive,
 A foe to all that's simple
 And human.
 Oh, my darling!
 The god that we shall follow
 Is love!

ADALGISA: To love! Don't say it!
 I cannot listen.

POLLIONE: Can you escape it?
 You have no place to hide,
 For love will find you.

ADALGISA: I've chosen another altar --
 I am wed to God.

POLLIONE: A false one! Obey your heart!

ADALGISA: No! I have chosen!

POLLIONE: Go, deny me,
 Yield not to pleading.
 Find a heaven
 That contains for me no mansion.

 I'd plumb the ocean
 And topple mountains,
 But to leave you, now or ever,
 Is beyond me.
 No, no! I cannot leave you,
 Now or ever.
 You deny, turn away the hungry heart.

ADALGISA: Ah, how dearly I've paid already
 For the thrill, the fleeting rapture
 Of surrender!

 At the altar that I've offended,
 I was shielded,
 Out of range of raving passion,
 Far, far out of range.

From a garden filled with roses,
From a lilac-scented haven,
From a home secure and sheltered
I have wandered far astray.

POLLIONE: Laws more lenient, gods more gracious
Hallow the homeland
Where I am headed.

ADALGISA: Homeward . . . headed? . . .

POLLIONE: Tomorrow morning.

ADALGISA: Leaving . . . without me?

POLLIONE: You're coming also.
At the altar of love we'll worship;
Joy and light will be our law.

ADALGISA: I implore you -- do not tempt me!

POLLIONE: I shall continue until you listen!
Serve with me the god of love!

ADALGISA: No, I dare not!

POLLIONE: Come, my darling! I'll give you courage.

ADALGISA: God in heaven, fortify my yielding heart.

POLLIONE: Can you abandon a man who's starving?
Can you ignore a call for help?
Adalgisa! Adalgisa!

Cross with me these hostile borders.
My beloved!
Far beyond this land of shadows,
We shall drift on quiet waters,
Breathe the air,
Breathe the air of golden meadows.

There on pathways flower-scented
We shall revel in the sun.
We shall live serene, contented,
Man and wife,
Man and wife, forever one.

ADALGISA: (There is no remaining shelter,
No place of shelter
From the storm that rushes through me.
Kneeling down before the altar,
There, even there, ah!
His force and fire undo me.

How to tame the beast of passion!
Where to find the peace I seek!
God, remove this sweet temptation,
Or forgive,
Or forgive a heart too weak.)

POLLIONE: Adalgisa!

ADALGISA: Oh, spare me, spare me!
Further pain can only follow.

POLLIONE: Adalgisa! Would you forsake me?

ADALGISA: Can I? . . . Ah!
No, my dearest! We'll leave together.

POLLIONE: Here we'll meet at dawn tomorrow.
Give your word!

ADALGISA: You have my promise.

POLLIONE: Swear it!

ADALGISA: I swear it!

POLLIONE: You will not fail me?
You'll remember?

ADALGISA: Yes, I'll remember.
Though from God I turn in torment,
My love I'll not betray.

POLLIONE: In your love I find my being.
Your harsh God,
Your God I dare defy.

ADALGISA: My love I'll not betray.

POLLIONE: Your God I dare defy. (*Exeunt*)

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

The scene changes to the simple house, hardly more than a hovel, where Norma leads a secluded, inconspicuous private life with her two small children -- children whose very existence is a matter of the utmost secrecy. So much for the vow of chastity.

To some, this might seem far fetched, but bear in mind that if this were a novel, the first hundred or so pages would probably be devoted to how the situation came about and the intricate subterfuges by which the secrecy has been maintained. But in the ongoing drama of opera there's no time for elaborate explanations, for which we can be profoundly grateful. We must accept the given fact. Our concern is not with the murky past but with the here and now, the unavoidable present: Norma's growing apprehension, her fear of abandonment, and her terror of what will happen to her children if the truth about her intimate involvement with the enemy come to light.

Yet even while grappling with these ominous uncertainties, she is still able to lend a warmly sympathetic ear to Adalgisa, her young votary, who comes to her with a tortured confession -- a story startlingly similar to her own.

Scene: Norma's dwelling. Norma is with Clotilda and with her two small children.

NORMA: Take them! Once again, conceal them.
Now more than ever,
I tremble as I embrace them.

CLOTILDA: And what foreboding drives you in fear
To chase away your children?

NORMA: Who knows? . . . Conflicting demons
Tear at my bosom,
Anger and pity.

I love and hate my children.
I suffer to see them,
And suffer when we are parted,
Pulled in two directions,
Joy chained to sorrow.
I glory and I shudder,
Torn and divided.

CLOTILDA: But you're a mother!

NORMA: Would I were not!

CLOTILDA: A clash of feeling . . .

NORMA: Far worse than you imagine.
My dear Clotilda!
Their father has been ordered
Homeward bound.

CLOTILDA: You're going with him?

NORMA: So cold, he tells me nothing!
Oh, does he mean to vanish,
Go off without me?
Can he forsake his children?
Leave me in anguish?

CLOTILDA: You fear he might?

NORMA: I dare not!
The thought is too appalling,
Too bewildering even to venture.
But someone's coming.
Go . . . Conceal them.

(Clotilda leaves with the children. Adalgisa enters.)

NORMA: Adalgisa!

ADALGISA: (Oh, heart! Be steady!)

NORMA: Come in, dear . . . Do not be timid . . .
My pretty, you seem so frightened.
I understand that you have a secret
You would like to tell me.

ADALGISA: I do . . . You, never tempted,
Far, far above the human storm,
Be kind to one who is weaker.
Give me your courage!
Oh, let share my burden
With a full confession.

NORMA: Embrace me . . . Speak freely . . .
What's the trouble?

ADALGISA: *(hesitantly)* A passion . . . I am in love!
Please understand -- I struggled,
I tried to fight it -- to no avail!

It conquered even my conscience.

Ah, but that is only the beginning!
Held in his arms, I promised
To flee the temple,
Renounce the altar, my center, my foundation!
Forsake my home and country . . .

NORMA: Poor tortured darling!
Your life that's just beginning!
Already darkened by shadows.
But tell me . . . This passion . . .
When did the flame ignite?

ADALGISA: Before I knew it . . .
A single sigh . . .
One exchange of glances,
There at the altar --
In fact, as I was praying.

I trembled . . .
I never finished
The prayer I had started.
Instead, I studied
The charm of his demeanor.
A new horizon opened before me.
A sweeter heaven unfolded.

NORMA: (I, too, remember!
I did the same . . .
I also surrendered to rapture
When first he caught my eye.)

ADALGISA: Why do you turn away?

NORMA: Pardon . . . Continue.

ADALGISA: Shyly . . . in secret . . . I waited,
Heedless of duty and danger.
Daily, the fire beyond control
Was burning ever brighter, ever stronger.

NORMA: (I also felt the fire!)

ADALGISA: Come to my arms, he pleaded.
Let me adore and worship,

Breathing the balm of springtime,
Tasting the wine of rapture.

NORMA: (How I remember!
My youth in all its magic!)

ADALGISA: All my life I've waited!
Grant me, grant me the kiss I crave!

NORMA: (Those very phrases!
With these delicious arrows
He overpowered
The fortress of my heart!)

ADALGISA: Sweet as the honey of paradise,
Softly his voice caressed me.
Warmed by the sunlight of ecstasy,
My heart began then to open.

NORMA: (I flowered in that sunlight!)

ADALGISA: I have no defenses, no excuses.
Humbly I plead for pardon.

NORMA: No need for tears; I understand.

ADALGISA: You are my inspiration!

NORMA: No need for tears . . .

ADALGISA: Scold, reprimand, chastise me,
Save me from total ruin!
Save me, oh save me from myself!

NORMA: From holy orders I now release you.
Without remorse, go forth to love in peace.

ADALGISA: Ah, my freedom! You give me freedom
To wed the man I love!

NORMA: Go forth, my darling, be of cheer;
You have my heartfelt sympathy.
From former vows entirely free,
Go wed your bold, handsome lover.

No longer bound to chastity
Nor sworn to God alone,
Go forth in peace and harmony
And make your life your own.

ADALGISA: Those welcome words again repeat!
They give me back my liberty.
Because of them, my path is sweet;
The long torment now is over.

My life you have restored to me;
The shame and guilt are gone.

NORMA: Go on . . . This man you so adore . . .
Possibly we're also acquainted.

ADALGISA: No native son, but a foreigner,
Rome is his country.

NORMA: A Roman! His name? . . . Continue.

(POLLIONE appears.)

ADALGISA: You see him . . .

NORMA: Pollione! Oh, no!

ADALGISA: You're angry?

NORMA: Is this . . . the man . . . you spoke of?
Tell me the truth.

ADALGISA: He is . . .

POLLIONE: Watch what you say! Be careful!

ADALGISA: *(stunned)* Careful?

NORMA: *(to Pollione)* Look at me . . . Turn around . . .
Are you afraid to face me?
She need not tremble.
Let fire fall, but not on her!
Stern hand of justice,
Fall not, fall not upon her.

Seek not to cast the blame on her;

You, you yourself are guilty!
Take warning, oh beware!
You wrong your children
And you are false to me.
Ah, monster!
You dare betray my trust!

ADALGISA: His children! Oh, deny it!
You are silent? . . . Say nothing?
I'm lost!

NORMA: Without remorse, he lied to you,
Made sport of trust and candor.
Long will you curse the day
You came to him unknowing,
To be torn to pieces.

Sorrow and tears eternal
Remain his lasting legacy.
Though my own trust he now betrays,
You may be certain:
He will betray,
He will betray you, too.

ADALGISA: Dark hang the clouds of mystery;
I grope among the shadows.
Oh, spare me the horror
Of truth too certain!

POLLIONE: Norma! I plead for clemency;
Temper your fire and thunder!
She still is young and innocent;
Add no reproaches
To a heavy burden.

ADALGISA: Past all recourse or remedy,
I drain the cup of sorrow,
Bitter beyond conceiving,
Beyond imagining,
If what I fear, what I fear is true.

POLLIONE: Conceal from eyes still radiant
Our past of stress and trial.
Heaven alone can weigh my wrong,
Judging impartially.

Heaven alone can weigh my wrongs done to you,
My wrongs inflicted on you.

NORMA: Shame on you!

POLLIONE: I'm leaving.

NORMA: Hear me out.

POLLIONE: *(to Adalgisa)* Come with me.

ADALGISA: Not I, sir! Stay away!
Faithless and cruel husband!

POLLIONE: Bones of the past I have buried.

ADALGISA: Away, sir! Off with you!

POLLIONE: Here's our chance of starting over.

ADALGISA: No! Not for me!

POLLIONE: Soldier of fortune,
By love am I commanded.
Where love would lead, I follow.
Oh, come with me!

NORMA: Very well . . . You've chosen.
So be it . . . Away, then!
(to Adalgisa) Go with him.

ADALGISA: Ah, no! Too late, too late.
I'd sooner die.

NORMA: *(to Pollione)* Cast aside your word of honor,
Leave behind your wife and children,
Find a home across the water.
Yet however far you travel,
My relentless curse will follow.

Disregard forgotten pledges,
Overlook the claims of duty.
Yes, be off! But my curse will follow,
My curse will follow.

Over mountains, beyond the rivers,
Through the valleys, my rage will find you out.
May the tempest, on my behalf,
Howl around you night and day.

POLLIONE: Hate, despise me! And hurl upon me
All your demons born of fury.
Yet my love for her is greater
Than the earth and sky united.

Bear me witness, eternal father,
As I stumble along the journey,
I'm determined, by all that's holy:
Love alone must guide my way.

ADALGISA: May I never, by deed or purpose,
Be the source of your tears of sorrow.
Henceforth, raise a barrier of sea and mountain
To stand between me and my deceiver.

My despair will grow familiar;
I shall stifle the cry of passion.
I would walk through fire and water
If these wrongs I could repay.

From outside, the sacred bronze is heard, summoning Norma.

NORMA: Ah, death is sounding!
(to Pollione) Go, go! Your end draws near.

ADALGISA: Ah, death is sounding!
Be wise and go. For you I fear.
Be careful. Death is sounding.
You must go; for you I fear.

POLLIONE: Ah, what sounds? I defy it!
They will be the first to fall. *(He leaves in a fury.)*

CHORUS: *(from outside)* Norma, hear, oh hear!
In fearful song
The sacred gong
Sends forth the signal.
Norma, heed the sacred call.

End of Act One

Heaven pardons the sin that gave them birth.

And are they now to die? . . .
Of what are they guilty?
Fathered by a monster!
That crime suffices.
For me, they have died already.
He, too, must lose them!
He, too, must suffer
As much as I have suffered.

Go on! Ah, no!
They are my children! My children!
Come here! Clotilda!

(Clotilda appears.)

Hurry! Go and find Adalgisa.

CLOTILDA: Close by she lingers,
Like a lost, lonely specter,
Praying and weeping. *(Exit)*

NORMA: Go! Accounts I shall settle . . .
And then . . . it's over. *(Adalgisa enters).*

ADALGISA: You sent to see me?
Ghostly is the pallor
That covers your face!

NORMA: Death casts the shadow.
The veil that hides my shame I shall open;
Then I shall ask one favor.
Hear me!
You will grant it
If my present grief
And my grief yet to come
Deserve compassion.

ADALGISA: I promise, not even knowing . . .

NORMA: But swear it.

ADALGISA: I swear it.

NORMA: Hear me . . . I've sinned so gravely
That I must cleanse the earth of my existence,
Erase the stain.

I cannot take with me
These guiltless creatures.
To you I entrust them.

ADALGISA: To me you entrust your children?

NORMA: Nourish them and love them,
You and your husband,
Whose name I dare not utter.

ADALGISA: I have no husband!

NORMA: Take him . . . To you may he be kinder.
In death do I forgive him.

ADALGISA: Husband! Oh, never!

NORMA: He is their father.
Watch over his children.

Take my darlings, give them shelter;
Like a mother, love and guide them.
Not to rob your future children --
Yours must hold the place of honor.

For my own, I'm simply asking
For relief from desolation.
In the role that I relinquish,
Take a tender mother's part.

As you love me, show compassion;
Draw the anguish from my heart.

ADALGISA: You can count on my love and devotion;
I revere you, and call you mother.
Reconsider . . . Oh, stay with your children!
Ask me not to take your place.

NORMA: You have sworn it.

ADALGISA: Yes, I meant it.
But I'm hoping to serve you better.
I shall go to him, persuade him;
In his ear I'll pour your sorrows.
The compassion then awakened
Will restore his real devotion.

Of forgotten joys I'll remind him,
Of the love that now lies sleeping.
In his heart, no longer dormant,
Norma will surely reign again.

Norma, believe me, he will listen;
I shall not appeal in vain.

NORMA: Beg for pity? From him?
I have chosen to die!

ADALGISA: Norma! This one time!

NORMA: No! Plead no longer.
Leave me! Go!

ADALGISA: Ah, no! And lose you? No! Ah, no!



Hear me, O Nor- ma, & hear your chil- dren. They are plead- ing for care & com- fort.

Can you leave them without a mother,
Lost and frightened, their lives not yet begun?

NORMA: What have I to give? My purse is empty.
What recourse remains, except surrender?
Vain illusions I leave to others;
Facing death, I cling to none.

ADALGISA: Live for your children!

NORMA: What hope have I? He loves you.

ADALGISA: Only in passing.

NORMA: And you?

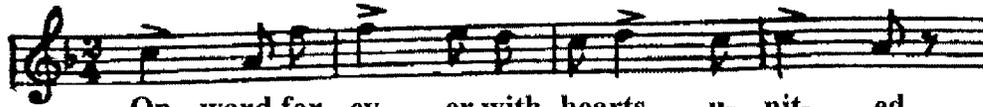
ADALGISA: I once did. But now I know:
Friendship is more important.

NORMA: You don't deceive me? My dearest!

ADALGISA: I shall restore your love to you,
Or I shall keep you company
Far from the eyes of man.

NORMA: Ah! You have won me!
Embrace me now . . .
I have at last found a friend.

TOGETHER:



On- ward for- ev- er with hearts u- nit- ed,
Bravely we travel, protected, befriended.
Twisting and turning, the weary way is lighted,
Safe for the journey that stretches unending.

Newly fortified,
My courage will not falter;
Calmly, side by side,
Our hearts will beat as one.

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

Scene: A lonely place near the forest of the Druids.

BASSES: Has he left?

TENORS: The foreign foe still is lurking.

BASSES: The foe is lurking.
Proof abundant!

TENORS: The cries of war!

BASSES: The clash of sword!

TENORS: Tread of feet, clash of sword.

TUTTI: The fife and drum,
The banners waving in the wind.

Despite the new delay,
Revolt is on the way.
Undeterred, we hold our bearing.
On the watch,

Until the time, until the time
For deeds of daring.
Undercover, we're preparing
For the fight, the final fight that's on the way.

OROVESO enters.

OROVESO: Brave soldiers,
I had been hoping to bring a message
Of change for the better.
The leader of the army
Has been recalled to Rome.
Brighter days you deserve,
But fate opposes.

WARRIORS: Tell us! The loathsome leader,
Our oppressor, continues to degrade us?
Not yet departed?

OROVESO: A leader yet more brutal
Arrives to take his place.
The ordeal is far from over.

WARRIORS: Does Norma know?
Like cowards, are we supposed to wait?

OROVESO: My question also,
But no reply from Norma.

WARRIORS: What's your conclusion?

OROVESO: We still must endure and suffer
Till times are riper;
Disband without revealing
How our hopes are thwarted.

WARRIORS: Go on pretending?

OROVESO: Ever the soldier, it galls me.
Brought to trial by brute oppression,
I would also raise the sword of righteous anger.
Higher wisdom forbids impatience.
Servile and silent,
We must bow and play the game.

WARRIORS: We serve and suffer
To suit the purpose,

But the rage continues to smolder.

OROVESO: With the mask of mild obedience
We shall catch the foe unguarded.
Comes the moment
When least expected --
Flaring up, the spark will burst into flame.

WARRIORS: Armed and eager at the signal,
Then we strike with deadly aim.
In the meantime,
Best to bow and play the game.
We'll be ready . . . *(Exeunt)*

ACT TWO SCENE THREE

Scene: The temple.

NORMA: *(alone)* He will return!
Yes, I can trust completely
In Adalgisa.
He will return repentant,
More considerate, more loving . . .

Oh, could I believe it!
The heavy clouds would lift,
December turn to April,
The sun emerging,
As on that day of wonder
When love first awakened.
Clotilda! *(Clotilda enters)*

CLOTILDA: Oh, Norma! Prepare for the worst!

NORMA: What happened?

CLOTILDA: Courage!

NORMA: Oh, tell me! Oh, tell me!

CLOTILDA: In vain Adalgisa pleaded, implored . . .

NORMA: Oh, why did I trust her
To be my go-between?

She left me in tears,
Her beauty enhanced by sorrow,
Full of fine intentions . . .
Quickly forgotten.

CLOTILDA: She, only she can tell you.
Tearful, despondent,
She comes, hoping to renew her vows.

NORMA: And he?

CLOTILDA: He swears to come and take her --
Yes, even from the altar!

NORMA: Monster beyond redemption!
His contempt cries for vengeance!
The clouds have gathered;
Now comes the storm,
Raining blood, like water.

(She sounds the gong three times. The Chorus enters.)

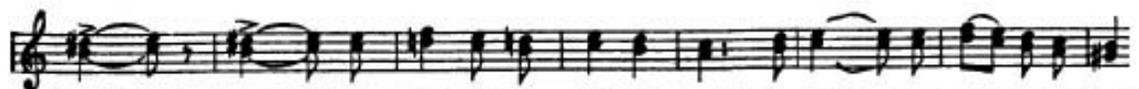
CHORUS: Sounds the long awaited signal!
Norma, we come,
Aroused by the sacred god of war!
Give us your answer:
What lies ahead?

NORMA: Slaughter! Plunder! Destruction!

CHORUS: To us you counseled
Caution and restraint, resignation . . .

NORMA: I change the message:
Riot, revenge, rebellion!
Sing out the song of battle
And show your courage!

CHORUS:



Free-dom! Free-dom! The pride we in- her-it calls to arms the high & the low.
Out for blood, like wolves of the forest,
We'll pursue and fall on the foe.

Firm of foot, and of danger defiant,
Through the dark we shall carry the light.
Watchful! Wary! At home is the hunter,
Bow in hand, the arrow in flight.
Seething! Surging! The cry of rebellion
Tells the oppressor and tyrant beware.
Soaring upward, the wide winged eagle
Takes command of the wind and the air.

Onward! Onward! The heart of the hero
Burns with fire as fierce as the sun.
No retreat! We fight to the finish,
Till the field of the battle is won.

OROVESO: *(to Norma)*

The rites demand a victim.
You must choose the one to perish.

NORMA: *(with irony)*

Oh, rest assured!
We've never lacked for victims
To appease the god of war.
I hear confusion . . . *CLOTILDA enters, much excited*

CLOTILDA:

Our temple desecrated!
And by a Roman,
Captured in the cloister
Set apart for the vestals.
Is nothing sacred?

CHORUS:

A Roman?

NORMA:

(A Roman? . . . Could he have done it?)

CHORUS:

They drag him forward. *(Pollione is brought in.)*

NORMA:

(I feared it!)

CHORUS:

Him we know.

NORMA:

(Now is the time for vengeance.)

OROVESO:

The enemy, so mighty!
What sport has led you to violate
Our holy places
And to challenge
The wrath of the gods?

POLLIONE: Kill me. But ask no further questions.

NORMA: I wield the dagger.
Make way for me!

POLLIONE: My avenger! Norma!

NORMA: Yes. Norma!

CHORUS: The man we feared and hated!
Show him no mercy.

NORMA: You shall die!

CHORUS: (*observing Norma*) You tremble?

NORMA: (My courage fails.)

CHORUS: You waver? You're undecided?

NORMA: (Has wrath begun to melt?)

CHORUS: To vengeance!

NORMA: I have to question further.
His crime involves another.
I may discover
What weak or wicked sister
Led the rascal onward
To an act of madness.
Leave us together.

CHORUS: (Dare we risk it?) (*Chorus exits.*)

POLLIONE: I shudder!

NORMA:



In my hands I hold you hos-tage; no one else can lift a fin- ger.
I can save you . . .

POLLIONE: Would you do it?

NORMA: I am willing.

POLLIONE: Your offer? . . .

NORMA: Hear me . . .

By your God, and by your children,
You will swear by all that's sacred,
You'll relinquish Adalgisa,
Here and now
Sever all connections.
For the bargain,
I shall release you.
After that, we shall never meet again.
Swear it . . .

POLLIONE: No! I'll not be bartered.

NORMA: Swear it, swear it!

POLLIONE: I choose to die.

NORMA: Foolish man! Do you imagine I am bluffing?

POLLIONE: Strike where you may.

NORMA: Understand,
You bring destruction on your children.

POLLIONE: What demon drives you?

NORMA: Yes, I raised the knife to slay them --
See the monster you have made me!
I retreated . . . But this time
For certain,
What I started I shall finish.
Shorn of mercy, no more a mother,
I'll ignore my stricken heart.

POLLIONE: Ah! So cruel!
Upon their father vent your fury!
I am prepared . . . Give me the dagger.

NORMA: To you?

POLLIONE: That I, I alone may fall the victim.

NORMA: Others with you!

By the score your men will topple;
They will fall like wheat in harvest,
And she as well.

POLLIONE: Not her!

NORMA: Sacred vows she has broken.

POLLIONE: And you condemn her?

NORMA: Adalgisa shall be punished!
My own hand will light the fire.
Die she must!

POLLIONE: Ah! My life is yours to play with,
But for her I beg for mercy.
Ah, for her, for her I plead.

NORMA: Now at last you beg for mercy!
I have found the way to hurt you.
Yes, I've the means at last to hurt you . . .

I shall feast upon your anguish.
With her death shall I repay you
For the wrong that I have suffered;
Your despair will equal mine.

POLLIONE: Ah! On me let fall your fury,
But grant her peace and pardon.
Let me die on wheels of torture,
Let my body burn to ashes,
Only spare this gentle flower
Green and tender on the vine.
Give me the dagger!

NORMA: How dare you! Away from me!

POLLIONE: The dagger! The dagger!

NORMA: Ola! You soldiers! Men and women!
Return! *CHORUS returns.*

NORMA: Food for the fire,
You shall have your victim:
A guilty sister of my own order
Who's broken sacred vows,

Betrayed her country,
Defied the will of God.

CHORUS: Such a monster in our midst!
A charge of treason!

NORMA: Yes . . . Get the fire ready.

POLLIONE: Turn back, I implore you!
Norma, relent . . .

CHORUS: Name her!

NORMA: I charge her . . .
(Can I, most guilty of all,
Accuse my sister?)

CHORUS: Tell us . . . Who is it?

POLLIONE: No! Answer not!

NORMA: It is I!

CHORUS: You! Norma!

NORMA: I've spoken. Prepare the fire.

CHORUS: You know the sentence.

POLLIONE: (She goes to die!)

CHORUS: Are you the culprit?

POLLIONE: Pay no attention!

NORMA: I do not deceive you.

CHORUS: Cursed be the day!

OROVESO: I bear the shame.

NORMA: The heart you hated,
Disowned, discarded,
In fire emerges
Disarmed and naked.

You tried to leave me;
In vain, departed.
Oh, cruel Roman!
With you I die.

Beyond the clashes
Of pride and anger,
We're now united
For all eternity.

The pyre prepared for me
For you is lighted;
Our mingled ashes
In peace will lie.

POLLIONE:

Too late are lifted
The clouds that blinded;
I rediscover
The love I slighted.

In shame and sorrow,
My life reawakens
To fresh devotion
Profound and true.

Together bonded
In sacred marriage,
My final whisper
Will offer love anew.

Though undeserving
Of trust requited,
Oh, grant me pardon
Before we die.

OROVESO & CHORUS:

Return to reason!
Restore the balance.
Console and comfort
A broken father.

Deny the charges;
Reject the story.
Speak out, acknowledge
A well-meant lie.

Our God who watches,

Austere and silent,
Will lightly punish
A false confession.

The dreadful thunder
Will keep a distance.
The pelting tempest
Will pass you by.
The wrath of God
Will pass you by.

CHORUS: Norma, speak! Claim your innocence.
You are silent . . . You do not hear us . . .

NORMA: Helpless! Oh, my children!

POLLIONE: Now alone, untended.

NORMA: Who can they turn to?

CHORUS: Can you be guilty? Guilty!

NORMA: Yes! Far beyond your worst suspicions.

CHORUS: Guilty!

NORMA: *(to Oroveso)* Oh, hear me!

OROVESO: Away from me!

NORMA: Please! I need you.

OROVESO: Would I were dead!

NORMA: I'm a mother . . .

OROVESO: A mother!

NORMA: No, hear me out!
My children are with Clotilda.
Father, when I am gone,
Take care of them.
Defend them from their foes.

OROVESO: I defend them? No! Leave me!

NORMA: Oh, father! Oh, father! That's all I ask.

OROVESO & CHORUS: No hope remains . . .

NORMA: Nurture the seed I leave behind;
 Shelter the budding flower.
 Let not my children suffer
 For guilt that I bear alone.

Nourish them in days of hunger;
 Cover them in nights of winter.
 Oh, father! They are your own!
 Their blood is yours, turn not away!
 Turn not away.

Father, you're weeping
 Warm tears of pardon . . .
 Your heart has melted;
 The tears betray you.

I weep no longer,
 But go contented.
 Serene, contented,
 I go to die.

POLLIONE: She stirs the heart
 With her plea.
 He weeps for her . . .
 In fear no longer,
 Serene, contented,
 I go to die.

OROVESO: By love I am conquered;
 My heart must yield.
 I weep for her . . .
 Daughter! May love prevail!
 On me you may rely.

Implore me no longer;
 Be comforted.
 So weep no more.

CHORUS: Can she hope for peace and pardon!
 Though she plead, our hearts must harden.

Tear from her the sacred myrtle!
Place the veil of death instead.

To the fire!
By your example
Cleanser the altar,
Restore the temple.

By your deed forever damned,
To death you go.
Forever damned,
To death you go.

NORMA: Now I leave you.
 Father, I leave you . . .

POLLIONE: In the fire, we burn together.
 There we enter the realm of perfect love.

OROVESO: Go with courage. My daughter!
 From a father's eyes
 The tears may freely flow.

THE END