

The Fortunes of King Croesus

ACT I

King Croesus of Lydia is placated by the love of his subjects, the protection of his warriors and a vast trove of gold, but the philosopher Solon cautions that one's fate may change at any time. Elmira is well aware of Solon's prophecies, for her own country of Media was overrun by the aggressive Persian King Cyrus. She has sought refuge in Croesus' court and has fallen in love with his son Atis, so she confides in her servant Trigesta. Atis returns her affection in kind, but he is not the only one. The ambitious prince Orsanés also desires Elmira and doesn't understand her convictions – Atis is, in his eyes, the lesser man, unable to speak since birth and forced to communicate with body language.

After Atis and Elmira share a tender moment, it is soon discovered that another Lydian prince, Eliates, loves Elmira's confidante, Clerida, who in turn desires Orsanés. The three try to sort out the impossible situation while the court jester Elcius, ever the commentator, mocks their desperation – all he needs is a jug of good wine to be content.

Croesus receives news that Persia has broken the peace and its troops are encroaching upon Lydian soil. The king gathers his soldiers and places Eliates in charge of the country during his and Atis' absence, an action which torments Orsanés.

Croesus' army engages Cyrus on the battlefield. The Lydian king is captured, news of which shocks Atis into speaking for the first time. Cyrus gloats over his captive, but a newly wise Croesus warns that overbearing pride may be Persian's undoing.

ACT II

Near the battlefield, Halimacus discloses to Atis his suspicions that Orsanés may be planning a political coup. Atis decides to disguise himself as a servant in order to discover more about the plot. The courtiers may notice a resemblance, but as it is widely known Atis cannot speak, the ruse should be effective.

Back at court, Elmira, Clerida and Orsanés continue to unravel their complicated entanglement. Eliates bemoans the weight of leadership, while Orsanés quietly notes that governing isn't for everyone. The Lydians are suddenly informed of their failure and their king's capture. Eliates rallies into service every able-bodied man.

Halimacus presents to Elmira "Ermin" (really Atis), a rather well-spoken servant her lover has sent. Elmira is immediately conflicted – should she feel joy at seeing Atis' likeness or sorrow over his absence. Eliates announces that half of the nation's wealth will be given as ransom for the king's release. An overly concerned "Ermin" asks why all the wealth is not handed over to save the king,

drawing rebuke from Orsanes – it is, after all, none of his affair.

Ermin decides to use his deception to test the constancy of his lover and brazenly begins to court her. Elmira's heart is divided – she finds herself equally attracted to this exact replica of Atis and finds his use of speech compelling.

Orsanes spots an opportunity to use Ermin to his advantage. He first suggests that the servant reappear at court dressed as Atis, and pretending to be dumb, indicate his unsuitability to rule. Ermin counters that this would be contrary to the prince's wishes, and anyways, "Atis" is scheduled to arrive that very day. Orsanes then commands the slave to slay Atis, take his place and then renounce his claim to the throne. Ermin quietly simmers over Orsanes' treachery.

At the Persian camp, Elcius tries to sell his wares. Croesus laments his desperate situation while Cyrus gloats over his conquest.

ACT III

Orsanes delights in the apparent success of his plan as Ermin, now dressed in princely clothes, confirms the "execution" of Atis. Elmira is pleased to be reunited with him, and he returns her love, which irks the still-smitten Orsanes. Eliates reports that Cyrus has rejected any peace offer and intends to conquer Lydia. He calls the people to arms.

Back in his peasant garb, Atis/Ermin continues to pursue Elmira, who remains troubled. She claims they cannot be together because of the difference in their social rank. Orsanes steals a private moment with Ermin, deriding both his refusal to cede power and his love for Elmira, but the "servant" will not be dissuaded. Encountering Elmira again, Ermin shows her a letter, written in Atis' hand, giving permission for her and the peasant to be together.

Elcius half-jokingly woos Trigesta, and tries to sell her a special substance that will restore her youth. Meanwhile, Elmira and Clerida are frustrated by their romantic lives and vow never to love again. Atis appears and confirms the contents of his letter. When she scorns him, he speaks for the first time, to Elmira's dismay. She is furious at being so deceived.

Back at the Persian camp, Croesus is about to be burned at the stake. The fire is lit, but then immediately extinguished by a sudden storm. When the flame is relit, Croesus' court appears and is alarmed by the frightful sight. Atis offers to be executed in his place, and faced with Cyrus' doubt over his true parentage (because the prince is known to be mute), he tries to throw himself on the pyre. Croesus recalls Solon's sage advice, and as the philosopher reiterates how the wheel of fortune is forever turning, Cyrus' heart is moved, for his luck could change at any time. Croesus is released, Atis' true identity is revealed to all, Orsanes' duplicity is forgiven and Atis and Elmira are finally united.