

THE RESURRECTION OF LUCRETIA
An Opera in Three Acts
Adapted from Livy's History of Rome Bks. I & II
Libretto and Music by Patricia Herzog
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LIBRETTO

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

Arruns (baritone), middle son of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus ("Tarquin the Proud"), the last king of Rome
Titus (tenor), eldest son of King Tarquin
Lucius Junius Brutus (baritone), nephew of King Tarquin/cousin of Arruns and Titus, legendary founder and first consul of the Roman Republic and purported ancestor of Caesar's assassin
Sextus (tenor), youngest son of King Tarquin
Collatinus (bass-baritone), husband of Lucretia, and with Brutus, co-consul of the Roman Republic
Lucretia (soprano), wife of Collatinus
Aurelia (soprano), servant of Lucretia
Sabina (mezzo), servant of Lucretia
Valerius (baritone), friend and fellow revolutionary of Collatinus and Brutus
Crowd at Lucretia's mock funeral
Two unnamed noblewomen (soprano and mezzo)
Two unnamed servant women (soprano and mezzo)
Lucretius (bass-baritone), father of Lucretia and successor consul to Brutus
Crowd (male chorus) at Brutus' funeral
Women worshippers (sopranos, mezzos) at Brutus' funeral

SETTING

509 BCE
The Oracle at Delphi on Mount Parnassus in Greece
An encampment near Ardea, a town outside Rome
The house of Lucretia and Collatinus in Collatia
Unnamed place of Lucretia's hiding in the countryside not far from Rome
The Capitoline Hill, Rome

Act I Scene 1

The oracle at Delphi. Arruns and Titus emerge from Apollo's sanctuary. They look contemptuously at Brutus struggling up the hill with a wooden staff.

Arruns (*contemptuously*)

Laggard!

Titus (*contemptuously*)

Laggard!

Arruns

See how he stumbles!

Titus

The oracle at Delphi ...

Arruns

Apollo's temple ...

Titus and Arruns (*mocking*)

Isn't much to look at, is it?

Arruns (*serious now*)

Still ...
Rome looks to Greece for wisdom.

Our Etruscans, it seems ...

Titus (*serious now*)

Seers though they be ...

Titus and Arruns

Cannot be trusted
In grave matters of state.

Titus

What is wisdom?

Arruns

Compared to might?

Titus

Apollo's temple ...

Titus and Arruns

To Jupiter's shrine?

Arruns (*anxiously*)

How is it now our father ...
sniffs ill-omened fortune?

Titus (*anxiously*)

A snake slithers out of a pillar ...

Titus and Arruns

How is it now our father ...
He who murdered his way to the throne ...
How is it now he quakes?

Titus

A tyrant, they say.
The people hate him.

Arruns

Fitting is it not ...
On this very spot ...

Titus

Apollo slew Python.

Arruns

Apollo slew a snake.

Titus (*to Arruns, about Brutus, contemptuously*)

Stragglng ass.
Why must he tag along?

Arruns (*sotto voce*)

The better to hide our purpose.

Titus

Idiot!
Aptly named, is he not?

Arruns

Remember what the Priestess said.

Titus

Whoever kisses mother first ...

Titus and Arruns

Inherits Rome!

(Brutus stumbles and falls. We, but not they, see him kiss the ground.)

Arruns

No one must ever know we were here.
Lest our younger brother ...

Titus

Younger but fiercer ...

Titus and Arruns

Make off with the crown!

Titus (*to Arruns, about Brutus*)

He pays no notice.

(Brutus does not respond. He looks at Arruns blankly, then turns away and stares into the distance.)

Arruns (*to Brutus, snickering*)

Brutus, do you hear?

Titus (*taunting*)

Dullard! Dotard! Numskull!
Are you there?

Arruns

Our father killed your brother.

Titus

Lucky for you you're stupid ...
Or you'd be dead, too!

Titus and Arruns (*exultant*)

Tarquinius Superbus, the King!
Tarquin the Proud!

Arruns

Junius Brutus the fool.
(to Titus, still looking at Brutus, ridiculing)
Haha! Look how he stares!

Titus

Haha! Idiot!

Arruns

Fixing his eyes on the distance.

Titus

Idiot!
As if he could see all the way to Rome

Arruns (*to Titus*)

Come, brother! Come!
Let us on to Rome!
(*turning contemptuously to Brutus*)
Come, cousin! Come!

Brutus (*simply, with apparent humility*)

I, too, wish to pay tribute.

Titus and Arruns

Haha, etc.

Arruns

Did you not see our sacks ...
Stuffed with sacred laurel ...
Laden with gold and precious stones?

Titus

Haha! Haha!
He'll offer the Priestess his walking stick!

Arruns

Hurry up with your silly gesture ...

Titus and Arruns

Go on!
Make haste!

The brothers face away from the sanctuary, preparing descend. No sooner are their backs turned than Brutus opens one end of his staff. Out slips a golden rod, elaborately carved. Rod in hand, he steps into the unseen interior of the sanctuary from whence the brothers had originally emerged.

End of Scene

Act I Scene 2

An encampment in the hills above Ardea, a town not far from Rome. It is dusk and the crickets are busy chirping. The men are sitting around, bored, waiting for Ardea, to which they have laid siege, to surrender.

Titus (*petulantly*)

Another night wasted ...

Arruns

Waiting ...

Sextus

Waiting ...

Collatinus

Waiting ...

Titus

Laying siege to Ardea.

Arruns (*soberly*)

Who cannot be beaten must be weakened.

Sextus (*wishfully*)

Ardea, they say ...
Overflows with wealth
Each household has two wells
One filled with water
The other one with gold.

Collatinus (*disgusted*)

Money ... always more money.

Titus (*proudly*)

By such means does the King ...
Magnify his glory.

Arruns (*soberly*)

By such means ...
Does he keep the people peaceful.

Sextus

Filled with gold!

Collatinus (*darkly*)

By such means does he oppress them ...
Working like slaves ...
Forced to dig a sewer ...
With their very own hands.

Sextus (*trying to lighten the mood*)

Come, gentlemen, come!
Let's have no more of this!
Tonight I am your host.
Come, gentlemen, come!
Let us slake our thirst with fine Etruscan wine!

From an amphora he pours wine into bowls. The men raise the bowls to their lips.

Titus, Arruns and Collatinus

Fine Etruscan wine!

Titus and Arruns

To King Tarquin's wine!

Sextus

The finest wine is like the finest wife!

Collatinus

The finest wife is time tested.

Arruns

The finest wife is modest and restrained.

Sextus (*getting aroused*)

Her voice sweetly sighing ...
Her body soft and yielding ...
The deep fleshy creases of her curves ...

Arruns (*rebuking*)

The finest wife is utterly pure.
Her virtue endures.

Titus returns the subject to wine, attempting to restore the levity of the earlier exchange.

Titus

There is nothing as sublime ...
As the finest wife ...
Except the pines of Rome!

Collatinus (*continuing on the subject of wives*)

To a chaste wife nothing can compare ...

Titus, Sextus and Arruns (*toasting*)

Pines of Rome!

Collatinus (*still referring to wives*)

There!
That settles it!

Sextus (*reverting to the subject of wives in a serious vein*)

I wonder ...
How do they spend their time.
What are they doing now, I wonder.

Do they while away the hours ...
In idle entertainment?
Or are they drinking like us ...
I wonder.

Do they sit alone and sigh?
Or make the time go by ...
In the arms of another lover?

Arruns shakes his head in disapproval. He feels it to be beneath his dignity to participate in the conversation and looks on skeptically while the others continue.

Collatinus

Gentlemen, let me assure you ...
Lucretia is at home in Collatia ...
Employed about the house ...
Arranging flowers ...
Weaving a laurel wreath ...
Or some such thing as chaste wives do.
Always making life pleasant for their husbands.

Sextus (*taunting*)

I'll lay you odds she's doing no such thing!

Collatinus (*unshaken in his conviction*)

Always ... always...

Titus (*excitedly*)

Let's hie! Let's hie!
Let's go spy on our wives!

Sextus (*joining in with laughter*)

To Rome and Collatia!

Titus and Sextus

Let's hie! Let's hie!

Titus (*raising his cup*)

On to Rome!

Sextus, Arruns and Collatinus (*raising their cups with Collatinus reluctantly joining in*)

On the Rome!

Titus

Then on to Collatia and Lucretia!

Sextus (*smiling mischievously*)

Lucretia!

End of Scene

Act I Scene 3

Collatia, outside Rome. Later the same night. The moon is high and the crickets quietly drone. The house of Lucretia and Collatinus, seen from afar. Arruns, Titus, Sextus and Collatinus are spying on Lucretia. She is weaving quietly

Collatinus (*trying not to be smug*)

Gentlemen, you've all seen your wives.
Now here's mine.
Behold Lucretia!

Sextus (*utterly captivated*)

What a vision!

Collatinus (*preaching to Sextus*)

Do not despair, Sextus.
A wife like yours ...
So young, barely ripe ...
Can hardly be expected to stay at home alone.

Titus (*rolling his eyes*)

My wife was a sight!

Arruns (*disgusted*)

Did you hear the way mine laughed?

Sextus (*continuing to stare at Lucretia*)

My blood grows hot!

Collatinus thinks Sextus is upset about his own wife and tries to console him.

Collatinus

Easy, Sextus ...
In time she'll learn the discipline of wifely devotion.

Titus (*still commenting on his own wife*)

Where did she learn to dance like that?

Arruns (*commenting on his wife*)

She made me want to slap her.

Titus (*trying to inject a note of levity*)

Mine had a fine time without me, I'd say!

Collatinus (*frankly gloating*)

Gentlemen, as you can see ...
I've clearly won the day!

Arruns (*snickering*)

Collatinus

Would that we had.
(*laughing*)
Too bad!

Sextus (*frankly admitting admiration for Lucretia*)

What does it matter?
Lucretia's beyond compare.

Titus and Arruns (*joining in Sextus' sentiment*)

Virtuous and fair.

Collatinus

Gentlemen ...
Our business is concluded.

Sextus (*wistfully*)

Who could leave such beauty?

Titus and Arruns (*joining in*)

Not I!

Sextus

Were she mine ...
I'd worry all the time.

Collatinus continues to reassure Sextus, taking him to be continuing to talk about his own wife.

Collatinus

Poor Sextus loves his wife to distraction!

Sextus (*ever more agitated*)

My heart races!
My blood grows hotter!

Collatinus continues to mistakenly think Sextus is talking about his own wife.

Collatinus

Easy, Sextus ...
To be young and have fun is no disgrace.

Sextus (*sotto voce, never taking his eyes off Lucretia*)

My course is set!

Collatinus (*gently coaxing*)

Come, Sextus ...

Arruns

Gentlemen ...
Our business is concluded.

Titus (*somewhat sarcastically*)

Would the war were, too.
We'd be at home ...
Ruling our wives.

Arruns and Collatinus sigh resignedly in agreement as they prepare to saddle up. Sextus remains fixed to the spot, his gaze steadily on Lucretia.

Collatinus (*trying not to gloat*)

Come, gentlemen ...
These are not grave faults.
Besides ...
Not every wife is blamelessly chaste.
Not every wife ...
Can be ...
Lucretia.

End of Scene

Act II Scene 1

The women have just finished weaving. Aurelia and Sabina are clearing away the loom and materials. Lucretia proudly displays the beautiful cloth.

Lucretia (*joyfully*)

There!
It's done!

Aurelia (*greatly admiring*)

Slender threads of gold and silver.
Purest whitest wool.

Sabina (*greatly admiring*)

Madam, permit me to say ...
You've outdone yourself with this one.

Lucretia

Finally done!

Aurelia (*clueless*)

Who will wear it, I wonder.

Lucretia (*playfully*)

Go on and guess!
(*Etc.*)

Aurelia and Sabina (*joining in the fun*)

Go on and guess!
(*Etc.*)
A royal tunic for a royal wedding!

Lucretia

Almost there!
Go on ... guess!

Aurelia

The King's sons are all married.

Sabina

The little ones are much too young.

Aurelia and Sabina (*slightly vexed*)

What royal son or daughter ...
Is yet to tie ...
The nuptial knot?
We're stumped! We're stumped!

Lucretia (*continuing gently to tease*)

No you're not!
A royal wedding *almost* ...
Is what I said.
Don't think too hard.
Don't look too far.

Aurelia and Sabina (*perplexed*)

Don't think too hard.
Don't look too far.

In the vicinity ...
No one makes such a tie ...
No one is getting married.

Lucretia

'Tis not true!

Sabina (*exasperated*)

I must confess I'm greatly vexed.

Aurelia

I can't guess, either.

Lucretia (*turning to Aurelia tenderly*)

Aurelia ...
Golden-haired Aurelia ...
In this you will be married.
In this ... in this ...
In this you will be married.

Sabina

Married ... married ...
In pure white wool ...
Gold and silver.

Aurelia (*deeply moved*)

A cloth so fine ...
Spun of pure white wool.
Silken soft with threads of gold and silver ...
Can't be mine!

Lucretia

Aurelia!
Are you not ...

Aurelia and Sabina

A cloth so fine ...

Lucretia

Made of precious stuff?

Aurelia

In this I shall be married.

Sabina

In this you shall be married.

(sotto voce, darkly)
I am no friend of marriage.
The Romans raped my ancestors.
The Romans raped the Sabine women.

Lucretia (*gently exercising her authority*)

Sabina ...
Come, let us make Aurelia's tunic.

Sabina turns to Aurelia with a mocking, but not unkind, gesture of servility.

Sabina

I bow low to Queen Aurelia.

Lucretia (*to Sabina, mildly reproving*)

Mocking's not allowed!

Slightly shaken, Sabina turns to Lucretia.

Sabina

Please forgive me.
Marriage makes me scared.
My ancestors ...
Whose very name I bear ...
Were raped.

Lucretia (*with great feeling*)

I wish for you, too, Sabina ...
A husband no less true ...
Than Collatinus.
(musing to herself with great longing)
Every night I rock myself to sleep ...
Tracing ... retracing ...
The contours of our love.

The women are surprised and disturbed to hear the wind chimes outside. They strain to listen.

Lucretia

A windless night. *(etc.)*
Why sound the chimes? *(etc.)*

Aurelia and Sabina

A windless night.
Why do the chimes sound?
Why do they sound?

Lucretia (*vexed*)

Who can it be ...
Disturbs my peace ...
At this hour?

Aurelia and Sabina

I will go see.
Go see.
I will see.
(*Etc.*)

Lucretia

Go see ... go see ...
(*Etc.*)

Aurelia and Sabina exit. They return not long after, announcing the arrival of Sextus, somewhat anxiously.

Aurelia and Sabina

A royal personage, alone.

Lucretia (*not anxious, eager to receive her royal guest*)

What are you waiting for?
Show him in!

Enter Sextus.

Sextus Tarquinius!
To what do we owe the honor of your visit?!

Sextus comports himself with extreme modesty. The ominous music belies his intention.

Sextus

Madam, I dread disturbing you.

Lucretia (*the soul of graciousness*)

You are most welcome ...
At any hour.

Sextus

My horse will go no further.
One more step, I fear ...

Lucretia

You will stay here, of course.

Sextus

I also have a man ...

Lucretia

Man and beast will be well-tended.

Sextus (*with a gesture of respect*)

Most gracious lady.

Lucretia (*anxiously*)

What news? What news?
What news of Collatinus?

Sextus

All is well.

Lucretia sighs with relief, then tries to suppress a yawn. Sextus notices.

Lucretia (*smiling sheepishly*)

The hour is late.

Sextus

The hour is late.

Lucretia

Sabina, fetch the groom.
Aurelia, show the men their rooms.

Aurelia and Sabina prepare to leave but do not exit yet.

Sextus

Most gracious lady.

Lucretia

More news can wait upon a good night's sleep.

Sextus

Most gracious lady.

Lucretia (*trying to suppress another yawn*)

The hour is late ...
To all a good night!

Lucretia remains as the others exit, setting off the wind chimes. She looks towards the exit with an expression that gives a hint of anxiety.

Act II Scene 2

Lucretia's darkened bed chamber. Sextus is standing beside the sleeping Lucretia.

Sextus (softly)

Lucretia!

Lucretia (still asleep)

Do I dream?

Sextus (*more insistently*)

Lucretia!

Lucretia (*rousing, confused*)

Whose voice is this?

Sextus forcefully bears down on her. His hand is on her chest and his voice is passionately pleading.

Sextus

Lucretia!

Lucretia (*fully conscious now, straining to speak*)

Sextus ...
I hardly draw my breath.

Sextus removes his hand and brandishes his knife.

Sextus (*softly but firmly*)

Stay, Lucretia ..
I have a knife.

Lucretia (*crying out*)

Aurelia!

Sextus (*covering her mouth with his hand*)

Softly, Lucretia ...
Let fear give way to tender sighs.
(*removes his hand and ardently implores*)
Easy, Lucretia ...
One night is all I ask.

Lucretia (*forcefully*)

Never!!

Sextus (*continuing to plead*)

Your husband's days must long be past.
Let me show you what is love, Lucretia!

Lucretia

Never!!

Sextus

Let fear give way to tender sighs.
Surrender, Lucretia!

Lucretia

Never on my life!

Sextus (*greatly agitated*)

Your heaving breast is more than I can bear.
Let me press you close to my chest.

Lucretia

O let me die!

Sextus

Your life is in my hands.

Lucretia

Kill me, then!

Sextus

Lucretia, I love you!

Lucretia

You who would be king, kill me!

Sextus

One night is all I ask.

Lucretia

Kill me now ...
Or let me take my life!

Sextus' tone changes from ardent to cold.

Sextus

Very well, Lucretia ...
Die!
Beside you will lie the body of my slave.
I'll say I found him in your arms.
All Rome will know your shame!
See you now, Lucretia ...
The senselessness of death.

Lucretia submits. She cannot bear being thought an adulteress.

Lucretia (*pleading*)

Spare my life, Sextus!

Sextus (*softening, passion rekindling*)

Lucretia!
Just one night of love is all I ask.

Lucretia (*rebuking*)

Collatinus will avenge me!

Sextus (*laughs*)

A woman's word is nothing!

Lucretia (*insisting*)

He will avenge me!

Sextus

He'll think you lie.

Lucretia (*calling out*)

Collatine!

Sextus (*smugly*)

Last night ...
Boasting of your chastity ...
Your husband dared to lecture me on marriage.

Lucretia (*shocked*)

What are you saying?

Sextus

Last night we spied on our wives.

Lucretia

He did this to me?

Lucretia lies silent and motionless at Sextus' feet, her will completely broken. Sextus drops to his knees, straddling her body. The stage goes dark.

End of Scene

Act II Scene 3

The next morning. Lucretia's bed chamber. Aurelia, Sabina, Collatinus, Valerius and Brutus are gathered around a barely conscious Lucretia.

Aurelia *(to Collatinus, clearly shaken)*

At break of day we heard her calling out ...

Sabina *(to Collatinus, clearly upset but more in control)*

"Collatine" she cried.
"Avenge me! Defend my honor!"

Collatinus *(greatly agitated)*

So faint ... so pale ...
Who loosed her sleeping gown?
How did her hair come undone?

He reaches over and gently covers her up.

Aurelia

We could not rouse her.

Collatinus

So faint ... so pale ...

Sabina *(reluctantly)*

The stables were empty.

Collatinus *(to Sabina, perplexed and agitated)*

What mean you?

Sabina

Sextus ...

Collatinus *(disbelieving)*

Tarquinius?

Sabina (*nodding reluctantly*)

Had already left.

Collatinus

But mean you Prince Tarquinius?

Sabina

His servant, too.

Valerius (*to the women, puzzled*)

So far from Ardea.
What were they doing here?

Aurelia

His horse, he said, could go no further.

Collatinus (*staring hard at Lucretia*)

By the gods!
My kinsman betrayed me!

Valerius (*commending the women*)

You did right to bring us here.

Collatinus speaks to Lucretia softly but urgently. Trying to rouse her, he gently places a hand on her shoulder.

Collatinus

Lucretia!

Violently, re-living the night's terror, Lucretia wakes and thrusts her hand forward in self-defense. Then, she recognizes Collatinus.

Lucretia

Dear gods! No!

Collatinus

Lucretia!

Lucretia (*weakly*)

Collatine?

Collatinus

You are safe now.

Aurelia

She welcomed him most openly.

Sabina

Befitting a royal guest.

Collatinus (*softly pleading*)

Lucretia ...
Let me take you into my arms.

Lucretia (*fully conscious now, angry and distrustful*)

Never!
No! Never!

Sabina

She bid us all a good-night.

Aurelia

We left them in their rooms.
Everyone, it seemed, slept soundly.

Sabina

Even the hounds.

Collatinus

Let me embrace you, Lucretia!

Lucretia (*repulsing Collatinus*)

Don't touch me!
Stay where you are!

Valerius

Poor woman.

Collatinus (*the horror fully sinking in*)

Sextus ... Tarquinius ... raped you!

The tone changes to a mournful one as Lucretia now recalls the events of the preceding night.

Lucretia

At first he tried to woo me.
Then threatened he ...
With this knife.

Lucretia reaches behind her and produces Sextus' knife. There are gasps all around. Collatinus reaches out for it but she pulls her arm back, retaining possession.

"Take my life," I cried.
(*darkly*)
"Death is senseless," said he.
"I'll say I found my slave enfolded in your arms.
All Rome shall know your shame!"

Lucretia is now filled with grief. But she never loses her dignity.

O Collatine!
That ... is when ... is when ...
I relented.

Collatinus (*with great feeling*)

Lucretia ...
Innocent and pure.

Lucretia (*with righteous anger*)

Collatine ... avenge me!

Collatinus

Innocent Lucretia!

Lucretia

Avenge me!
Defend my honor!

Collatinus

Innocent and pure.

In a moment of self-doubt, Collatinus looks back at Valerius for confirmation. The eyes of Brutus and the women never stray from Lucretia. Seizing the opportunity of her husband's distraction, Lucretia raises the knife and makes ready to stab herself.

(*to Valerius*)
I am right, am I not?

Aurelia (*shrieking*)

No!

Aurelia faints and Sabina rushes to her side. Collatinus is frozen with fear. Brutus steps forward and stays Lucretia's hand.

Brutus (*to Sabina, with calm authority*)

Quick now!
Take her away!

Helped by Sabina, Aurelia staggers to her feet. The women exit. All eyes are on Brutus now. Lucretia regains her composure and the mood shifts dramatically.

Lucretia

How thin was your disguise, Brutus!

Brutus (*with great simplicity and sympathy*)

Madam ...
I mean you no harm.
Long ago ...
I resolved to find safety in contempt ...
Justice ...
Being not enough to protect me.
Madam ...
I mean you no harm ...

Lucretia (*composed and dignified*)

I do not dispute you.
Still ...
I must die.

Collatinus (*desperately*)

No! No!

Lucretia (*turning to Collatinus, full of feeling*)

O Collatine ...
No longer will we taste ...
The chaste joys of love.
And yet, for that ...
I would not take my life.

The will is hidden, you see.

Collatinus (*greatly disturbed*)

What mean you, Lucretia?

Lucretia (*speaking calmly and with great composure*)

Who is to say the women do not lie?
Let rape be no excuse for guilty pleasure ...
Lest ev'ry adult'ress cry ...
"I've been violated!"

Collatinus (*incredulous*)

Lucretia, what are you saying?

Lucretia (*firmly, in a low tone*)

Death alike awaits ...
The guilty and the chaste.

Collatinus

Lucretia, no!

Lucretia (*turning on Collatinus, angrily*)

Braggart!
You did this to me!
How dare you parade my wifely virtue!

Collatinus (*full of contrition*)

Forgive me, Lucretia!
I beg you!

Lucretia reaches for the knife in Brutus' hand. He pulls it out of reach.

Brutus (*totally composed and with authority*)

Madam, I demur ...
Death is senseless.
Only its seeming serves a purpose.

Lucretia (*to Brutus, distrustfully*)

Dissembler!
What is your meaning?

Brutus

A husband stung with grief cannot defend you.
Better to let him win you back.

Valerius (*agreeing*)

Brutus speaks the truth.
A man unnerved by sorrow ...
Can not act.

Lucretia (*pushing the theme of the lying women*)

But, the women!

Brutus (*pushing the theme of revenge*)

Never will they know you're alive.
Your husband will avenge you.
Then, fearing retribution ...
He will flee and be with you in hiding.

Lucretia (*admitting the force of Brutus' argument*)

Shrewd Brutus!

Collatinus (*anxiously*)

But where?
Where will you take her?

Brutus (*to Collatinus*)

Lest longing tempt you ...
Endangering us all ...
I alone must know for now.

Valerius

But how?
She must be laid to rest.

Brutus

Indeed, she must.
All Rome will know her virtue!

Lucretia

Noble Brutus!

Collatinus bows his head in resignation and gestures in a particular direction.

Collatinus

In a potter's field not far from here ...
Lies a woman's body.

The grave is freshly dug.

End of Scene

Act III Scene1

The funeral procession. A line of men forms behind the body covered with a shroud—the cloth Lucretia had woven for Aurelia's wedding--and carried on the shoulders of Collatinus, Valerius and Brutus. They arrive at the tomb of Collatinus' ancient and noble family. The crowd gathers around. The men are in the foreground. The women are off to the side. 'Lucretia's' body is placed inside. The people gather round. Brutus, brandishing Lucretia's blood-stained knife, steps forward to address them.

Brutus (*solemnly*)

Here lies Lucretia.
Daughter of Lucretius.
Wife of Collatinus.
A woman most noble.
Modest and restrained.
Innocent and pure.
Paragon of wifely virtue.
Here lies Lucretia ...
None more chaste ...
'Til a tyrant wronged her!

The crowd of men becomes agitated. Brutus' delivery intensifies.

"Avenge me!" she cried.
Then took she this blood-stained knife ...
(*brandishes Lucretia's bloody knife*)
And dove it into her chest.
A royal knife.

The crowd exclaims in horror.

Shall we not avenge her?

The crowd erupts with cries of "Avenge her! Avenge her!"

Free people!
Free people!
Let us on to Rome!
Lucretia must not die in vain!
Rise up!
Revolt!
Cast off the yoke of tyranny!

The crowd is in a frenzy with cries of "Rise up! Revolt!"

Rise up!
Revolt!
To Rome and revolution!

Still brandishing the knife, Brutus turns to face Rome. The men form ranks behind him and start to file off. The crowd, in a war chant, cries: "To Rome! To Rome and revolution!!" Crowd and Brutus exit.

The women stay behind tending Lucretia's tomb. Alongside it they place laurel wreaths, bunches of flowers and other offerings. Aurelia emerges from the crowd and kneels before the entrance, praying. Concerned, Sabina steps forward and stands behind her. Two women, noble by demeanor and attire, stand apart.

Woman One (*approaching Sabina*)

Who is that woman?

Sabina (*not taking her eyes off Aurelia*)

Lucretia's faithful servant ...
As was I.
Lucretia's shroud ...
Was to be her wedding gown.

Woman One

Poor woman.
What is she saying?

Sabina

She prays.

Aurelia (*ecstatically*)

Lucretia!
Guard my wifely chastity!

Still kneeling, Aurelia turns and looks expectantly Woman One. She points to an imaginary something in the distance.

See!
Over there ...
Lucretia's shrine!
Where I'm pointing.
(insistent)
Over there!
The women are praying.
Soon I will join them!

Sabina *(to Woman One)*

Grief is speaking.
She knows not what she says.

Woman One *(musing to Woman Two)*

A shrine to wifely virtue ...

Woman Two *(joining in)*

A cult of marital devotion ...

Woman One

On the Capitoline ...
A sacred site abandoned ...

Woman One and Woman Two

A fitting place to pray ...
To Lucretia!

End of Scene

Act III Scene 2

A simple dwelling tucked into a hillside. In a field nearby, Lucretia is absorbed picking wildflowers. Two servant woman watch her. They are holding baskets containing the flowers she has picked

Servant Woman One

Our lady ...
Of the wildflowers ...

Servant Woman Two

Picking ... weeding ...

SW One

Each day she spends alone ...

SW Two

Each day she combs the fields ...

SW One

She hardly ever speaks ...

SW One and Two

Except to ask what news of Rome.

Lucretia (*looking up distractedly*)

What say your husbands?
What news have you of Rome?

SW One (*darkly*)

The man who put his sons to death ...

Lucretia (*quickenning*)

Mean you Junius Brutus?

SW One

Fearing their disloyalty ...

Lucretia (*alarmed*)

What news have you of Brutus?

SW One and Two

He rode out to meet the enemy.
Tarquin's son ...

SW Two

Arruns.

Lucretia (*trying not to show her agitation*)

Brutus?

SW One and Two

Each had a knife ...
And drove the other through.

Lucretia lets out a long anguished cry.

Brutus!
Dead ... dead ... dead ...

SW One and Two (*upset, to each other*)

What did we do to upset her?

Lucretia (*issuing an order*)

Quick now!
Gather my things!

The women exit. Lucretia is alone now and free to express her feelings about Brutus, which she does with great dignity and feeling.

Lucretia

Noble Brutus!
Truly did you love the Roman people!

I go to mourn you.
Then will I find Collatinus.

Noble Brutus!
Truly did you love Lucretia!

My life you saved ...
That I might live to see ...
A free people!

Noble Brutus ...
It was your fate ...
And mine ...
To be undone by a Tarquin!

Brutus, truly did you love ...

Lucretia's soliloquy is interrupted by the off-stage shuffling and muted tittering of the women, signifying their return. She speaks sotto voce, to herself.

Lucretia

Veiled ...
Draped in grief ...
No one must know Lucretia lives.

Veiled in grief.
I go ... I go ...
To Rome.

End of Scene

Act III Scene 3

Brutus' funeral. Lucretia's father Lucretius officiates. Lucretia, incognito, is in the crowd of onlookers. Nearby is Lucretia's shrine. Women worshippers, modestly enrobed with heads hooded, go in and out.

Lucretius (*proclaiming loudly and proudly*)

Free people!

Lucretia (*sotto voce, quiet yet clearly audible, with a kind of breathless urgency*)

Father!
Father!
So old and frail he looks.
I wonder ...
Did Brutus tell him ...
I wonder ...

Lucretius (*uttered with simplicity and severity*)

Lucius ... Junius ... Brutus ...
Dead.

Lucretia

Does he know I'm still alive?

Lucretius (*escalating in intensity*)

Let us swear by Brutus' oath ...
Never again to know the will of tyrants!

Crowd of Men

We swear by Brutus' oath ...
Never again to know the will of tyrants!

Lucretius

Noble Brutus!
Of such stern stuff ...
No other one was ever made.

(severely)

For their treasonous design ...
Before his very eyes ...
His sons he had beaten and beheaded.

(proclaiming)

Free people!

(in a more muted tone)

An idiot, he seemed ...
Cloaked in stupidity.
Waiting ... waiting ...
To vanquish a tyrant!

Then came the day ...
The tyrant's son ...

Lucretius cannot bring himself to say "rape" but the crowd knows what he means and reacts accordingly, with gasps, cries and sighs. With the deepest feeling he utters his daughter's name.

Lucretia!

The crowd of mourners is deeply stirred. Struggling to hold back his tears, Lucretius' tone softens. Turning and gesturing towards the shrine, he speaks as if to Lucretia.

See, Lucretia!
Women worship at your shrine!

Lucretius turns back to the crowd, bidding them approach Brutus' body.

Gentlemen, come!
Let us honor Brutus!

One by one, the men file past the body. All eyes are on the procession.

Aurelia and Sabina are walking towards Lucretia's shrine. They speak in muted tones so as not to be noticed. They are dressed as ordinary women, not like the women worshippers. Aurelia has a shawl around her shoulders. She is whispering anxiously to Sabina.

Aurelia

Last night ...
He touched me.
My husband's trusted friend ...
Laid his hands upon me.
I did not know what to do.
(innocently)
Sabina, was I raped?

Sabina *(shaking her head)*

I don't know.

Aurelia *(looking at the shrine)*

Lucretia will know.

Sabina *(alarmed)*

Aurelia!

Aurelia

She'll tell me what to do.

Sabina

Aurelia, what are you saying?

Aurelia *(ecstatically)*

They say that she speaks in heroic meter ...

Aurelia goes up to the entrance to the shrine. Sabina tries desperately to get her to listen.

Sabina

Don't go in!
Aurelia, don't go in!

Aurelia

Just like the oracle at Delphi!
I long to hear her.

Aurelia and Sabina

My heart ... My friend ...

Aurelia

Sabina!

Sabina

Don't go!

Aurelia

I will go pray.

Sabina

No voice in there ...
Just empty air.

Aurelia enters the shrine, respectfully covering her head with her shawl. Sabina stays outside.

Pray, Aurelia.
Pray to Lucretia.
May she release you from that terrible vow!

Aurelia emerges from the shrine, knife in hand, and starts walking away from the crowd. She is eerily self-possessed, as if in a trance.

Aurelia

I was raped!
I, too, was dishonored.

To everyone's horror, she raises the knife and makes ready to stab herself in the chest.

Now will I be punished like Lucretia.

The men exclaim in horror but are slow to act.

Crowd of Men

No! No! No! No!

As they start to move towards her, Lucretia decisively steps forward, and, still cloaked in mourning, stays Aurelia's hand. Aurelia reacts angrily. The struggle over control of the knife.

Aurelia

Let go! Let go!

Lucretia

Aurelia!

Lucretia throws off her veil. The crowd reacts with stunned silence.

Aurelia

Lucretia!

Aurelia lets go the knife and falls to her knees. She reaches for and takes Lucretia's hand. Still holding Aurelia's hand, Lucretia turns to her father.

Lucretia

Father ... father ...

Lucretius

Is this a ghost I see before me?

Lucretia

Like Aurelia ...
I had a knife.
It was Brutus stayed my hand.
My seeming death, he said ...
Was proof enough against the Tarquins!
(darkly)
Would that Brutus, too, ...
In death were only seeming.

Lucretia turns to Aurelia, taking both of her hands. She speaks with great simplicity and resolve. The women gather around them.

Aurelia ...
I was mistaken.

Aurelia (*confused*)

The will is hidden.
Who will believe ...

Lucretia

Why did I think ...

Aurelia

I did not wish it?
Who will believe ...

Lucretia

Why did I think ...

Aurelia

I do not lie?

Lucretia

Women lie?
Pride made me vain.
Why did I say ..
They do not speak the truth?

Aurelia ...
Believe me ...
Swear by me still ...

Still holding Aurelia's hand, Lucretia lifts her eyes to address the crowd of mourners.

Let this be the oath of Lucretia ...
Believe the women!

The women worshippers slowly start to gather around Lucretia and Aurelia. One by one, they step out of the group and turn to face the men. Gradually, they remove their hoods.

Chorus of Woman Worshippers *(their voices staggered)*

Believe the women!
Believe them!
(Etc.)

Sabina, who has been hanging back, now approaches Lucretia and Aurelia. Lucretia joyfully receives her, stretching out her free hand. Aurelia gives Sabina her other hand. Lucretia and Sabina help the still-shaken Aurelia to her feet. With Aurelia in the middle, holding hands with Lucretia and Sabina at either side, the women gradually move towards the others and eventually come to the fore. All the women, hoods off, are facing the audience now. (Possibly, they shed their robes and reveal their modern dress, cut-offs, piercings, tattoos, funky haircuts and hair colors, etc. They are us!)

Lucretia, Aurelia, Sabina and Chorus of Women Worshippers *(in unison)*

Believe the women!
Believe them!

END OF OPERA