

WEBSTER JOHN

THE DUCHESS
OF MALFI

John Webster

The Duchess of Malfi

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Of John Webster's life almost nothing is known. The dates 1580-1625 given for his birth and death are conjectural inferences, about which the best that can be said is that no known facts contradict them.

The first notice of Webster so far discovered shows that he was collaborating in the production of plays for the theatrical manager, Henslowe, in 1602, and of such collaboration he seems to have done a considerable amount. Four plays exist which he wrote alone, "The White Devil," "The Duchess of Malfi," "The Devil's Law-Case," and "Appius and Virginia."

"The Duchess of Malfi" was published in 1623, but the date of writing may have been as early as 1611. It is based on a story in Painter's "Palace of Pleasure," translated from the Italian novelist, Bandello; and it is entirely possible that it has a foundation in fact. In any case, it portrays with a terrible vividness one side of the court life of the Italian Renaissance; and its picture of the fierce quest of pleasure, the recklessness of crime, and the worldliness of the great princes of the Church finds only too ready corroboration in the annals of the time.

Webster's tragedies come toward the close of the great series of tragedies of blood and revenge, in which "The Spanish Tragedy" and "Hamlet" are landmarks, but before decadence can fairly be said to have set in. He, indeed, loads his scene with horrors almost past the point which modern taste can bear; but the intensity of his dramatic situations, and his superb power of flashing in a single line a light into the recesses of the human heart at the crises of supreme emotion, redeems him from mere sensationalism, and places his best things in the first rank of dramatic writing.

Dramatis Personae:

FERDINAND [Duke of Calabria].

CARDINAL [his brother].

ANTONIO [BOLOGNA, Steward of the Household to the Duchess].

DELIO [his friend].

DANIEL DE BOSOLA [Gentleman of the Horse to the Duchess].

[CASTRUCCIO, an old Lord].

MARQUIS OF PESCARA.

[COUNT] MALATESTI.

RODERIGO,]

SILVIO,] [Lords].

GRISOLAN,]

DOCTOR.

The Several Madmen.

DUCHESS [OF MALFI].

CARIOLA [her woman].

[JULIA, Castruccio's wife, and] the Cardinal's mistress.

[Old Lady].

Ladies, Three Young Children, Two Pilgrims, Executioners,
Court Officers, and Attendants.

ACT I

SCENE I¹

[Enter] ANTONIO and DELIO

DELIO. You are welcome to your country, dear Antonio;
You have been long in France, and you return
A very formal Frenchman in your habit:
How do you like the French court?
ANTONIO. I admire it:
In seeking to reduce both state and people
To a fix'd order, their judicious king
Begins at home; quits first his royal palace
Of flattering sycophants, of dissolute
And infamous persons, – which he sweetly terms
His master's master-piece, the work of heaven;
Considering duly that a prince's court
Is like a common fountain, whence should flow
Pure silver drops in general, but if 't chance
Some curs'd example poison 't near the head,
Death and diseases through the whole land spread.
And what is 't makes this blessed government
But a most provident council, who dare freely
Inform him the corruption of the times?
Though some o' the court hold it presumption
To instruct princes what they ought to do,
It is a noble duty to inform them
What they ought to foresee.² – Here comes Bosola,
The only court-gall; yet I observe his railing
Is not for simple love of piety:
Indeed, he rails at those things which he wants;
Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud,
Bloody, or envious, as any man,
If he had means to be so. – Here's the cardinal.

[Enter CARDINAL and BOSOLA]

BOSOLA. I do haunt you still.

CARDINAL. So.

BOSOLA. I have done you better service than to be slighted thus.
Miserable age, where only the reward of doing well is the doing

¹ Malfi. The presence-chamber in the palace of the Duchess.

² Prevent.

of it!

CARDINAL. You enforce your merit too much.

BOSOLA. I fell into the galleys in your service: where, for two years together, I wore two towels instead of a shirt, with a knot on the shoulder, after the fashion of a Roman mantle. Slighted thus! I will thrive some way. Black-birds fatten best in hard weather; why not I in these dog-days?

CARDINAL. Would you could become honest!

BOSOLA. With all your divinity do but direct me the way to it. I have known many travel far for it, and yet return as arrant knaves as they went forth, because they carried themselves always along with them. [Exit CARDINAL.] Are you gone? Some fellows, they say, are possessed with the devil, but this great fellow were able to possess the greatest devil, and make him worse.

ANTONIO. He hath denied thee some suit?

BOSOLA. He and his brother are like plum-trees that grow crooked over standing-pools; they are rich and o'erladen with fruit, but none but crows, pies, and caterpillars feed on them. Could I be one of their flattering panders, I would hang on their ears like a horseleech, till I were full, and then drop off. I pray, leave me. Who would rely upon these miserable dependencies, in expectation to be advanc'd to-morrow? What creature ever fed worse than hoping Tantalus? Nor ever died any man more fearfully than he that hoped for a pardon. There are rewards for hawks and dogs when they have done us service; but for a soldier that hazards his limbs in a battle, nothing but a kind of geometry is his last supportation.

DELIO. Geometry?

BOSOLA. Ay, to hang in a fair pair of slings, take his latter swing in the world upon an honourable pair of crutches, from hospital to hospital. Fare ye well, sir: and yet do not you scorn us; for places in the court are but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower.

[Exit.]

DELIO. I knew this fellow seven years in the galleys
For a notorious murder; and 'twas thought
The cardinal suborn'd it: he was releas'd
By the French general, Gaston de Foix,
When he recover'd Naples.

ANTONIO. 'Tis great pity
He should be thus neglected: I have heard
He 's very valiant. This foul melancholy
Will poison all his goodness; for, I 'll tell you,
If too immoderate sleep be truly said
To be an inward rust unto the soul,
If then doth follow want of action
Breeds all black malcontents; and their close rearing,

Like moths in cloth, do hurt for want of wearing.

SCENE II³

ANTONIO, DELIO, [Enter SILVIO, CASTRUCCIO, JULIA, RODERIGO
and GRISOLAN]

DELIO. The presence 'gins to fill: you promis'd me
To make me the partaker of the natures
Of some of your great courtiers.

ANTONIO. The lord cardinal's
And other strangers' that are now in court?
I shall. – Here comes the great Calabrian duke.

[Enter FERDINAND and Attendants]

FERDINAND. Who took the ring oftenest?⁴

SILVIO. Antonio Bologna, my lord.

FERDINAND. Our sister duchess' great-master of her household?
Give him the jewel. – When shall we leave this sportive action,
and fall to action indeed?

CASTRUCCIO. Methinks, my lord, you should not desire to go to war
in person.

FERDINAND. Now for some gravity. – Why, my lord?

CASTRUCCIO. It is fitting a soldier arise to be a prince, but not
necessary a prince descend to be a captain.

FERDINAND. No?

CASTRUCCIO. No, my lord; he were far better do it by a deputy.

FERDINAND. Why should he not as well sleep or eat by a deputy?
This might take idle, offensive, and base office from him, whereas
the other deprives him of honour.

CASTRUCCIO. Believe my experience, that realm is never long in
quiet
where the ruler is a soldier.

FERDINAND. Thou toldest me thy wife could not endure fighting.

CASTRUCCIO. True, my lord.

FERDINAND. And of a jest she broke of⁵ a captain she met full of
wounds: I have forgot it.

CASTRUCCIO. She told him, my lord, he was a pitiful fellow, to lie,
like the children of Ismael, all in tents.⁶

FERDINAND. Why, there's a wit were able to undo all the
chirurgeons⁷ o' the city; for although gallants should quarrel,
and had drawn their weapons, and were ready to go to it, yet her

³ The same.

⁴ The reference is to the knightly sport of riding at the ring.

⁵ At the expense of.

⁶ Rolls of lint used to dress wounds.

⁷ Surgeons.

persuasions would make them put up.

CASTRUCCIO. That she would, my lord. – How do you like my Spanish gennet?⁸

RODERIGO. He is all fire.

FERDINAND. I am of Pliny's opinion, I think he was begot by the wind; he runs as if he were ballass'd⁹ with quicksilver.

SILVIO. True, my lord, he reels from the tilt often.

RODERIGO, GRISOLAN. Ha, ha, ha!

FERDINAND. Why do you laugh? Methinks you that are courtiers should be my touch-wood, take fire when I give fire; that is, laugh when I laugh, were the subject never so witty.

CASTRUCCIO. True, my lord: I myself have heard a very good jest, and have scorn'd to seem to have so silly a wit as to understand it.

FERDINAND. But I can laugh at your fool, my lord.

CASTRUCCIO. He cannot speak, you know, but he makes faces; my lady cannot abide him.

FERDINAND. No?

CASTRUCCIO. Nor endure to be in merry company; for she says too much

laughing, and too much company, fills her too full of the wrinkle.

FERDINAND. I would, then, have a mathematical instrument made for her face, that she might not laugh out of compass. – I shall shortly visit you at Milan, Lord Silvio.

SILVIO. Your grace shall arrive most welcome.

FERDINAND. You are a good horseman, Antonio; you have excellent riders in France: what do you think of good horsemanship?

ANTONIO. Nobly, my lord: as out of the Grecian horse issued many famous princes, so out of brave horsemanship arise the first sparks of growing resolution, that raise the mind to noble action.

FERDINAND. You have bespoke it worthily.

SILVIO. Your brother, the lord cardinal, and sister duchess.

[Enter CARDINAL, with DUCHESS, and CARIOLA]

CARDINAL. Are the galleys come about?

GRISOLAN. They are, my lord.

FERDINAND. Here 's the Lord Silvio is come to take his leave.

DELIO. Now, sir, your promise: what 's that cardinal?

I mean his temper? They say he 's a brave fellow,

Will play his five thousand crowns at tennis, dance,

Court ladies, and one that hath fought single combats.

ANTONIO. Some such flashes superficially hang on him for form; but observe his inward character: he is a melancholy churchman.

⁸ A small horse.

⁹ Ballasted.

The spring in his face is nothing but the engend'ring of toads;
where he is jealous of any man, he lays worse plots for them than
ever was impos'd on Hercules, for he strews in his way flatterers,
panders, intelligencers, atheists, and a thousand such political
monsters. He should have been Pope; but instead of coming to it
by the primitive decency of the church, he did bestow bribes
so largely and so impudently as if he would have carried it away
without heaven's knowledge. Some good he hath done —

DELIO. You have given too much of him. What 's his brother?

ANTONIO. The duke there? A most perverse and turbulent nature.

What appears in him mirth is merely outside;

If he laught heartily, it is to laugh

All honesty out of fashion.

DELIO. Twins?

ANTONIO. In quality.

He speaks with others' tongues, and hears men's suits

With others' ears; will seem to sleep o' the bench

Only to entrap offenders in their answers;

Dooms men to death by information;

Rewards by hearsay.

DELIO. Then the law to him

Is like a foul, black cobweb to a spider, —

He makes it his dwelling and a prison

To entangle those shall feed him.

ANTONIO. Most true:

He never pays debts unless they be shrewd turns,

And those he will confess that he doth owe.

Last, for this brother there, the cardinal,

They that do flatter him most say oracles

Hang at his lips; and verily I believe them,

For the devil speaks in them.

But for their sister, the right noble duchess,

You never fix'd your eye on three fair medals

Cast in one figure, of so different temper.

For her discourse, it is so full of rapture,

You only will begin then to be sorry

When she doth end her speech, and wish, in wonder,

She held it less vain-glory to talk much,

Than your penance to hear her. Whilst she speaks,

She throws upon a man so sweet a look

That it were able to raise one to a galliard.¹⁰

That lay in a dead palsy, and to dote

On that sweet countenance; but in that look

There speaketh so divine a continence

As cuts off all lascivious and vain hope.

Her days are practis'd in such noble virtue,

That sure her nights, nay, more, her very sleeps,

¹⁰ A lively dance.

Are more in heaven than other ladies' shrifts.
Let all sweet ladies break their flatt'ring glasses,
And dress themselves in her.
DELIO. Fie, Antonio,
You play the wire-drawer with her commendations.
ANTONIO. I 'll case the picture up: only thus much;
All her particular worth grows to this sum, —
She stains¹¹ the time past, lights the time to come.
CARIOLA. You must attend my lady in the gallery,
Some half and hour hence.
ANTONIO. I shall.

[Exeunt ANTONIO and DELIO.]

FERDINAND. Sister, I have a suit to you.
DUCHESS. To me, sir?
FERDINAND. A gentleman here, Daniel de Bosola,
One that was in the galleys —
DUCHESS. Yes, I know him.
FERDINAND. A worthy fellow he is: pray, let me entreat for
The provisorship of your horse.
DUCHESS. Your knowledge of him
Commends him and prefers him.
FERDINAND. Call him hither.

[Exit Attendant.]

We [are] now upon¹² parting. Good Lord Silvio,
Do us commend to all our noble friends
At the leaguer.
SILVIO. Sir, I shall.
[DUCHESS.] You are for Milan?
SILVIO. I am.
DUCHESS. Bring the caroches.¹³— We 'll bring you down
To the haven.

[Exeunt DUCHESS, SILVIO, CASTRUCCIO, RODERIGO, GRISOLAN,
CARIOLA, JULIA, and Attendants.]

CARDINAL. Be sure you entertain that Bosola
For your intelligence.¹⁴ I would not be seen in 't;
And therefore many times I have slighted him

¹¹ Throws into the shade.

¹² At the point of.

¹³ Coaches.

¹⁴ Spy.

When he did court our furtherance, as this morning.
FERDINAND. Antonio, the great-master of her household,
Had been far fitter.
CARDINAL. You are deceiv'd in him.
His nature is too honest for such business. —
He comes: I'll leave you.

[Exit.]

[Re-enter BOSOLA]

BOSOLA. I was lur'd to you.
FERDINAND. My brother, here, the cardinal, could never
Abide you.
BOSOLA. Never since he was in my debt.
FERDINAND. May be some oblique character in your face
Made him suspect you.
BOSOLA. Doth he study physiognomy?
There 's no more credit to be given to the face
Than to a sick man's urine, which some call
The physician's whore, because she cozens¹⁵ him.
He did suspect me wrongfully.
FERDINAND. For that
You must give great men leave to take their times.
Distrust doth cause us seldom be deceiv'd.
You see the oft shaking of the cedar-tree
Fastens it more at root.
BOSOLA. Yet take heed;
For to suspect a friend unworthily
Instructs him the next way to suspect you,
And prompts him to deceive you.
FERDINAND. There 's gold.
BOSOLA. So:
What follows? [Aside.] Never rain'd such showers as these
Without thunderbolts i' the tail of them. — Whose throat must I cut?
FERDINAND. Your inclination to shed blood rides post
Before my occasion to use you. I give you that
To live i' the court here, and observe the duchess;
To note all the particulars of her haviour,
What suitors do solicit her for marriage,
And whom she best affects. She 's a young widow:
I would not have her marry again.
BOSOLA. No, sir?
FERDINAND. Do not you ask the reason; but be satisfied.
I say I would not.
BOSOLA. It seems you would create me
One of your familiars.

¹⁵ Cheats.

FERDINAND. Familiar! What 's that?

BOSOLA. Why, a very quaint invisible devil in flesh, —
An intelligencer.¹⁶

FERDINAND. Such a kind of thriving thing
I would wish thee; and ere long thou mayst arrive
At a higher place by 't.

BOSOLA. Take your devils,
Which hell calls angels! These curs'd gifts would make
You a corrupter, me an impudent traitor;
And should I take these, they'd take me [to] hell.

FERDINAND. Sir, I 'll take nothing from you that I have given.
There is a place that I procur'd for you
This morning, the provisorship o' the horse;
Have you heard on 't?

BOSOLA. No.

FERDINAND. 'Tis yours: is 't not worth thanks?

BOSOLA. I would have you curse yourself now, that your bounty
(Which makes men truly noble) e'er should make me
A villain. O, that to avoid ingratitude
For the good deed you have done me, I must do
All the ill man can invent! Thus the devil
Candies all sins o'er; and what heaven terms vile,
That names he complimentary.

FERDINAND. Be yourself;
Keep your old garb of melancholy; 'twill express
You envy those that stand above your reach,
Yet strive not to come near 'em. This will gain
Access to private lodgings, where yourself
May, like a politic dormouse —

BOSOLA. As I have seen some
Feed in a lord's dish, half asleep, not seeming
To listen to any talk; and yet these rogues
Have cut his throat in a dream. What 's my place?
The provisorship o' the horse? Say, then, my corruption
Grew out of horse-dung: I am your creature.

FERDINAND. Away!

[Exit.]

BOSOLA. Let good men, for good deeds, covet good fame,
Since place and riches oft are bribes of shame.
Sometimes the devil doth preach.

[Exit.]

¹⁶ Spy.

[Scene III]¹⁷

[Enter FERDINAND, DUCHESS, CARDINAL, and CARIOLA]

CARDINAL. We are to part from you; and your own discretion
Must now be your director.

FERDINAND. You are a widow:
You know already what man is; and therefore
Let not youth, high promotion, eloquence —

CARDINAL. No,
Nor anything without the addition, honour,
Sway your high blood.

FERDINAND. Marry! they are most luxurious¹⁸ Will wed
twice.

CARDINAL. O, fie!

FERDINAND. Their livers are more spotted
Than Laban's sheep.¹⁹

DUCHESS. Diamonds are of most value,
They say, that have pass'd through most jewellers' hands.

FERDINAND. Whores by that rule are precious.

DUCHESS. Will you hear me?
I 'll never marry.

CARDINAL. So most widows say;
But commonly that motion lasts no longer
Than the turning of an hour-glass: the funeral sermon
And it end both together.

FERDINAND. Now hear me:
You live in a rank pasture, here, i' the court;
There is a kind of honey-dew that 's deadly;
'T will poison your fame; look to 't. Be not cunning;
For they whose faces do belie their hearts
Are witches ere they arrive at twenty years,
Ay, and give the devil suck.

DUCHESS. This is terrible good counsel.

FERDINAND. Hypocrisy is woven of a fine small thread,
Subtler than Vulcan's engine:²⁰ yet, believe 't,
Your darkest actions, nay, your privat'st thoughts,
Will come to light.

CARDINAL. You may flatter yourself,
And take your own choice; privately be married
Under the eaves of night —

FERDINAND. Think 't the best voyage

¹⁷ Malfi. Gallery in the Duchess' palace.

¹⁸ Lustful.

¹⁹ Genesis xxxi., 31-42.

²⁰ The net in which he caught Venus and Mars.

That e'er you made; like the irregular crab,
Which, though 't goes backward, thinks that it goes right
Because it goes its own way: but observe,
Such weddings may more properly be said
To be executed than celebrated.

CARDINAL. The marriage night
Is the entrance into some prison.

FERDINAND. And those joys,
Those lustful pleasures, are like heavy sleeps
Which do fore-run man's mischief.

CARDINAL. Fare you well.
Wisdom begins at the end: remember it.

[Exit.]

DUCHESS. I think this speech between you both was studied,
It came so roundly off.

FERDINAND. You are my sister;
This was my father's poniard, do you see?
I 'd be loth to see 't look rusty, 'cause 'twas his.
I would have you give o'er these chargeable revels:
A visor and a mask are whispering-rooms
That were never built for goodness, – fare ye well —
And women like variety of courtship.
What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale
Make a woman believe? Farewell, lusty widow.

[Exit.]

DUCHESS. Shall this move me? If all my royal kindred
Lay in my way unto this marriage,
I 'd make them my low footsteps. And even now,
Even in this hate, as men in some great battles,
By apprehending danger, have achiev'd
Almost impossible actions (I have heard soldiers say so),
So I through frights and threatenings will assay
This dangerous venture. Let old wives report
I wink'd and chose a husband. – Cariola,
To thy known secrecy I have given up
More than my life, – my fame.

CARIOLA. Both shall be safe;
For I 'll conceal this secret from the world
As warily as those that trade in poison
Keep poison from their children.

DUCHESS. Thy protestation
Is ingenious and hearty; I believe it.
Is Antonio come?

CARIOLA. He attends you.

DUCHESS. Good dear soul,
Leave me; but place thyself behind the arras,
Where thou mayst overhear us. Wish me good speed;
For I am going into a wilderness,
Where I shall find nor path nor friendly clue
To be my guide.
[Cariola goes behind the arras.]

[Enter ANTONIO]

 I sent for you: sit down;
Take pen and ink, and write: are you ready?
ANTONIO. Yes.
DUCHESS. What did I say?
ANTONIO. That I should write somewhat.
DUCHESS. O, I remember.
After these triumphs and this large expense
It 's fit, like thrifty husbands,²¹ we inquire
What 's laid up for to-morrow.
ANTONIO. So please your beauteous excellence.
DUCHESS. Beauteous!
Indeed, I thank you. I look young for your sake;
You have ta'en my cares upon you.
ANTONIO. I 'll fetch your grace
The particulars of your revenue and expense.
DUCHESS. O, you are
An upright treasurer: but you mistook;
For when I said I meant to make inquiry
What 's laid up for to-morrow, I did mean
What 's laid up yonder for me.
ANTONIO. Where?
DUCHESS. In heaven.
I am making my will (as 'tis fit princes should,
In perfect memory), and, I pray, sir, tell me,
Were not one better make it smiling, thus,
Than in deep groans and terrible ghastly looks,
As if the gifts we parted with procur'd²² That violent distraction?
ANTONIO. O, much better.
DUCHESS. If I had a husband now, this care were quit:
But I intend to make you overseer.
What good deed shall we first remember? Say.
ANTONIO. Begin with that first good deed began i' the world
After man's creation, the sacrament of marriage;
I 'd have you first provide for a good husband;
Give him all.

²¹ Housekeepers.

²² Produced.

DUCHESS. All!

ANTONIO. Yes, your excellent self.

DUCHESS. In a winding-sheet?

ANTONIO. In a couple.

DUCHESS. Saint Winifred, that were a strange will!

ANTONIO. 'Twere stranger²³ if there were no will in you
To marry again.

DUCHESS. What do you think of marriage?

ANTONIO. I take 't, as those that deny purgatory,
It locally contains or heaven or hell;
There 's no third place in 't.

DUCHESS. How do you affect it?

ANTONIO. My banishment, feeding my melancholy,
Would often reason thus.

DUCHESS. Pray, let 's hear it.

ANTONIO. Say a man never marry, nor have children,
What takes that from him? Only the bare name
Of being a father, or the weak delight
To see the little wanton ride a-cock-horse
Upon a painted stick, or hear him chatter
Like a taught starling.

DUCHESS. Fie, fie, what 's all this?
One of your eyes is blood-shot; use my ring to 't.
They say 'tis very sovereign. 'Twas my wedding-ring,
And I did vow never to part with it
But to my second husband.

ANTONIO. You have parted with it now.

DUCHESS. Yes, to help your eye-sight.

ANTONIO. You have made me stark blind.

DUCHESS. How?

ANTONIO. There is a saucy and ambitious devil
Is dancing in this circle.

DUCHESS. Remove him.

ANTONIO. How?

DUCHESS. There needs small conjuration, when your finger
May do it: thus. Is it fit?

[She puts the ring upon his finger]: he kneels.

ANTONIO. What said you?

DUCHESS. Sir,
This goodly roof of yours is too low built;
I cannot stand upright in 't nor discourse,
Without I raise it higher. Raise yourself;
Or, if you please, my hand to help you: so.

[Raises him.]

²³ Qq. read STRANGE.

ANTONIO. Ambition, madam, is a great man's madness,
That is not kept in chains and close-pent rooms,
But in fair lightsome lodgings, and is girt
With the wild noise of prattling visitants,
Which makes it lunatic beyond all cure.
Conceive not I am so stupid but I aim²⁴ Whereeto your favours tend:
but he 's a fool
That, being a-cold, would thrust his hands i' the fire
To warm them.

DUCHESS. So, now the ground 's broke,
You may discover what a wealthy mine
I make your lord of.

ANTONIO. O my unworthiness!

DUCHESS. You were ill to sell yourself:
This dark'ning of your worth is not like that
Which tradesmen use i' the city; their false lights
Are to rid bad wares off: and I must tell you,
If you will know where breathes a complete man
(I speak it without flattery), turn your eyes,
And progress through yourself.

ANTONIO. Were there nor heaven nor hell,
I should be honest: I have long serv'd virtue,
And ne'er ta'en wages of her.

DUCHESS. Now she pays it.
The misery of us that are born great!
We are forc'd to woo, because none dare woo us;
And as a tyrant doubles with his words,
And fearfully equivocates, so we
Are forc'd to express our violent passions
In riddles and in dreams, and leave the path
Of simple virtue, which was never made
To seem the thing it is not. Go, go brag
You have left me heartless; mine is in your bosom:
I hope 'twill multiply love there. You do tremble:
Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh,
To fear more than to love me. Sir, be confident:
What is 't distracts you? This is flesh and blood, sir;
'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster
Kneels at my husband's tomb. Awake, awake, man!
I do here put off all vain ceremony,
And only do appear to you a young widow
That claims you for her husband, and, like a widow,
I use but half a blush in 't.

ANTONIO. Truth speak for me;
I will remain the constant sanctuary
Of your good name.

DUCHESS. I thank you, gentle love:

²⁴ Guess.

And 'cause you shall not come to me in debt,
Being now my steward, here upon your lips
I sign your Quietus est.²⁵ This you should have begg'd now.
I have seen children oft eat sweetmeats thus,
As fearful to devour them too soon.

ANTONIO. But for your brothers?

DUCHESS. Do not think of them:
All discord without this circumference
Is only to be pitied, and not fear'd:
Yet, should they know it, time will easily
Scatter the tempest.

ANTONIO. These words should be mine,
And all the parts you have spoke, if some part of it
Would not have savour'd flattery.

DUCHESS. Kneel.

[Cariola comes from behind the arras.]

ANTONIO. Ha!

DUCHESS. Be not amaz'd; this woman 's of my counsel:
I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber
Per verba [de] presenti²⁶ is absolute marriage.

[She and ANTONIO kneel.]

Bless, heaven, this sacred gordian²⁷ which let violence
Never untwine!

ANTONIO. And may our sweet affections, like the spheres,
Be still in motion!

DUCHESS. Quickening, and make
The like soft music!

ANTONIO. That we may imitate the loving palms,
Best emblem of a peaceful marriage,
That never bore fruit, divided!

DUCHESS. What can the church force more?

ANTONIO. That fortune may not know an accident,
Either of joy or sorrow, to divide
Our fixed wishes!

DUCHESS. How can the church build faster?²⁸ We now are
man and wife, and 'tis the church
That must but echo this. – Maid, stand apart:
I now am blind.

ANTONIO. What 's your conceit in this?

DUCHESS. I would have you lead your fortune by the hand
Unto your marriage-bed:
(You speak in me this, for we now are one:)
We 'll only lie and talk together, and plot

²⁵ The phrase used to indicate that accounts had been examined and found correct.

²⁶ Using words of present time; i.e., "I take," not "I will take."

²⁷ Knot.

²⁸ More firmly.

To appease my humorous²⁹ kindred; and if you please,
Like the old tale in ALEXANDER AND LODOWICK,
Lay a naked sword between us, keep us chaste.
O, let me shrowd my blushes in your bosom,
Since 'tis the treasury of all my secrets!

[Exeunt DUCHESS and ANTONIO.]

CARIOLA. Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman
Reign most in her, I know not; but it shows
A fearful madness. I owe her much of pity.

[Exit.]

²⁹ Of difficult disposition.

Act II

Scene I³⁰

[Enter] BOSOLA and CASTRUCCIO

BOSOLA. You say you would fain be taken for an eminent courtier?

CASTRUCCIO. 'Tis the very main³¹ of my ambition.

BOSOLA. Let me see: you have a reasonable good face for 't already, and your night-cap expresses your ears sufficient largely. I would have you learn to twirl the strings of your band with a good grace, and in a set speech, at th' end of every sentence, to hum three or four times, or blow your nose till it smart again, to recover your memory. When you come to be a president in criminal causes, if you smile upon a prisoner, hang him; but if you frown upon him and threaten him, let him be sure to scape the gallows.

CASTRUCCIO. I would be a very merry president.

BOSOLA. Do not sup o' nights; 'twill beget you an admirable wit.

CASTRUCCIO. Rather it would make me have a good stomach to quarrel;

for they say, your roaring boys eat meat seldom, and that makes them so valiant. But how shall I know whether the people take me for an eminent fellow?

BOSOLA. I will teach a trick to know it: give out you lie a-dying, and if you hear the common people curse you, be sure you are taken for one of the prime night-caps.³² [Enter an Old Lady]

You come from painting now.

OLD LADY. From what?

BOSOLA. Why, from your scurvy face-physic. To behold thee not painted inclines somewhat near a miracle. These in thy face here were deep ruts and foul sloughs the last progress.³³ There was a lady in France that, having had the small-pox, flayed the skin off her face to make it more level; and whereas before she looked like a nutmeg-grater, after she resembled an abortive hedge-hog.

OLD LADY. Do you call this painting?

BOSOLA. No, no, but you call [it] careening³⁴ of an old morphewed³⁵ lady, to make her disembugue³⁶ again:

³⁰ Malfi. An apartment in the palace of the Duchess.

³¹ Chief part.

³² Bullies (Hazlitt); lawyers (Vaughan).

³³ Royal journey.

³⁴ Turning a boat on its side for repairs.

³⁵ Scabbed.

³⁶ Empty.

there 's rough-cast phrase to your plastic.³⁷

OLD LADY. It seems you are well acquainted with my closet.

BOSOLA. One would suspect it for a shop of witchcraft, to find in it the fat of serpents, spawn of snakes, Jews' spittle, and their young children's ordure; and all these for the face. I would sooner eat a dead pigeon taken from the soles of the feet of one sick of the plague, than kiss one of you fasting. Here are two of you, whose sin of your youth is the very patrimony of the physician; makes him renew his foot-cloth with the spring, and change his high-pric'd courtezan with the fall of the leaf. I do wonder you do not loathe yourselves.

Observe my meditation now.

What thing is in this outward form of man

To be belov'd? We account it ominous,

If nature do produce a colt, or lamb,

A fawn, or goat, in any limb resembling

A man, and fly from 't as a prodigy:

Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity

In any other creature but himself.

But in our own flesh though we bear diseases

Which have their true names only ta'en from beasts, —

As the most ulcerous wolf and swinish measles, —

Though we are eaten up of lice and worms,

And though continually we bear about us

A rotten and dead body, we delight

To hide it in rich tissue: all our fear,

Nay, all our terror, is, lest our physician

Should put us in the ground to be made sweet. —

Your wife 's gone to Rome: you two couple, and get you to the wells at Lucca to recover your aches. I have other work on foot.

[Exeunt CASTRUCCIO and Old Lady]

I observe our duchess

Is sick a-days, she pukes, her stomach seethes,

The fins of her eye-lids look most teeming blue,³⁸

She wanes i' the cheek, and waxes fat i' the flank,

And, contrary to our Italian fashion,

Wears a loose-bodied gown: there 's somewhat in 't.

I have a trick may chance discover it,

A pretty one; I have bought some apricocks,

The first our spring yields.

[Enter ANTONIO and DELIO, talking together apart]

DELIO.

And so long since married?

³⁷ Face-modeling (Sampson). "There's a plain statement of your practises."

³⁸ Blue like those of a woman with child.

You amaze me.

ANTONIO. Let me seal your lips for ever:
For, did I think that anything but th' air
Could carry these words from you, I should wish
You had no breath at all. – Now, sir, in your contemplation?
You are studying to become a great wise fellow.

BOSOLA. O, sir, the opinion of wisdom is a foul tetter³⁹ that runs all
over a man's body: if simplicity direct us to have
no evil, it directs us to a happy being; for the subtlest folly
proceeds from the subtlest wisdom: let me be simply honest.

ANTONIO. I do understand your inside.

BOSOLA. Do you so?

ANTONIO. Because you would not seem to appear to th' world
Puff'd up with your preferment, you continue
This out-of-fashion melancholy: leave it, leave it.

BOSOLA. Give me leave to be honest in any phrase, in any compliment
whatsoever. Shall I confess myself to you? I look no higher than
I can reach: they are the gods that must ride on winged horses.
A lawyer's mule of a slow pace will both suit my disposition and
business; for, mark me, when a man's mind rides faster than his horse
can gallop, they quickly both tire.

ANTONIO. You would look up to heaven, but I think
The devil, that rules i' th' air, stands in your light.

BOSOLA. O, sir, you are lord of the ascendant,⁴⁰ chief man with
the duchess: a duke was your cousin-german remov'd. Say you were
lineally descended from King Pepin, or he himself, what of this?
Search the heads of the greatest rivers in the world, you shall find
them but bubbles of water. Some would think the souls of princes
were brought forth by some more weighty cause than those of meaner
persons: they are deceiv'd, there 's the same hand to them; the like
passions sway them; the same reason that makes a vicar go to law for
a tithe-pig, and undo his neighbours, makes them spoil a whole
province, and batter down goodly cities with the cannon.

[Enter DUCHESS and Ladies]

DUCHESS. Your arm, Antonio: do I not grow fat?
I am exceeding short-winded. – Bosola,
I would have you, sir, provide for me a litter;
Such a one as the Duchess of Florence rode in.

BOSOLA. The duchess us'd one when she was great with child.

DUCHESS. I think she did. – Come hither, mend my ruff:
Here, when? thou art such a tedious lady; and
Thy breath smells of lemon-pills: would thou hadst done!
Shall I swoon under thy fingers? I am

³⁹ Scurf.

⁴⁰ Person of highest influence.

So troubled with the mother!⁴¹

BOSOLA. [Aside.] I fear too much.

DUCHESS. I have heard you say that the French courtiers
Wear their hats on 'fore that king.

ANTONIO. I have seen it.

DUCHESS. In the presence?

ANTONIO. Yes.

DUCHESS. Why should not we bring up that fashion?

'Tis ceremony more than duty that consists

In the removing of a piece of felt.

Be you the example to the rest o' th' court;

Put on your hat first.

ANTONIO. You must pardon me:

I have seen, in colder countries than in France,

Nobles stand bare to th' prince; and the distinction

Methought show'd reverently.

BOSOLA. I have a present for your grace.

DUCHESS. For me, sir?

BOSOLA. Apricocks, madam.

DUCHESS. O, sir, where are they?

I have heard of none to-year⁴²

BOSOLA. [Aside.] Good; her colour rises.

DUCHESS. Indeed, I thank you: they are wondrous fair ones.

What an unskilful fellow is our gardener!

We shall have none this month.

BOSOLA. Will not your grace pare them?

DUCHESS. No: they taste of musk, methinks; indeed they do.

BOSOLA. I know not: yet I wish your grace had par'd 'em.

DUCHESS. Why?

BOSOLA. I forgot to tell you, the knave gardener,

Only to raise his profit by them the sooner,

Did ripen them in horse-dung.

DUCHESS. O, you jest. —

You shall judge: pray, taste one.

ANTONIO. Indeed, madam,

I do not love the fruit.

DUCHESS. Sir, you are loth

To rob us of our dainties. 'Tis a delicate fruit;

They say they are restorative.

BOSOLA. 'Tis a pretty art,

This grafting.

DUCHESS. 'Tis so; a bettering of nature.

BOSOLA. To make a pippin grow upon a crab,

A damson on a black-thorn. — [Aside.] How greedily she eats them!

A whirlwind strike off these bawd farthingales!

For, but for that and the loose-bodied gown,

⁴¹ Hysteria.

⁴² This year.

I should have discover'd apparently⁴³
The young springal⁴⁴ cutting a caper in her belly.
DUCHESS. I thank you, Bosola: they were right good ones,
If they do not make me sick.
ANTONIO. How now, madam!
DUCHESS. This green fruit and my stomach are not friends:
How they swell me!
BOSOLA. [Aside.] Nay, you are too much swell'd already.
DUCHESS. O, I am in an extreme cold sweat!
BOSOLA. I am very sorry.

[Exit.]

DUCHESS. Lights to my chamber! – O good Antonio,
I fear I am undone!
DELIO. Lights there, lights!

Exeunt DUCHESS [and Ladies.]

ANTONIO. O my most trusty Delio, we are lost!
I fear she 's fall'n in labour; and there 's left
No time for her remove.
DELIO. Have you prepar'd
Those ladies to attend her; and procur'd
That politic safe conveyance for the midwife
Your duchess plotted?
ANTONIO. I have.
DELIO. Make use, then, of this forc'd occasion.
Give out that Bosola hath poison'd her
With these apricocks; that will give some colour
For her keeping close.
ANTONIO. Fie, fie, the physicians
Will then flock to her.
DELIO. For that you may pretend
She'll use some prepar'd antidote of her own,
Lest the physicians should re-poison her.
ANTONIO. I am lost in amazement: I know not what to think on 't.

Exeunt.

⁴³ Clearly.

⁴⁴ Youngster.

Scene II⁴⁵

[Enter] BOSOLA and Old Lady

BOSOLA. So, so, there 's no question but her techiness⁴⁶ and most vulturous eating of the apricocks are apparent signs of breeding, now?

OLD LADY. I am in haste, sir.

BOSOLA. There was a young waiting-woman had a monstrous desire to see the glass-house —

OLD LADY. Nay, pray, let me go. I will hear no more of the glass-house. You are still⁴⁷ abusing women!

BOSOLA. Who, I? No; only, by the way now and then, mention your frailties. The orange-tree bears ripe and green fruit and blossoms all together; and some of you give entertainment for pure love, but more for more precious reward. The lusty spring smells well; but drooping autumn tastes well. If we have the same golden showers that rained in the time of Jupiter the thunderer, you have the same Danaes still, to hold up their laps to receive them. Didst thou never study the mathematics?

OLD LADY. What 's that, sir?

BOSOLA. Why, to know the trick how to make a many lines meet in one

centre. Go, go, give your foster-daughters good counsel: tell them, that the devil takes delight to hang at a woman's girdle, like a false rusty watch, that she cannot discern how the time passes.

[Exit Old Lady.]

[Enter ANTONIO, RODERIGO, and GRISOLAN]

ANTONIO. Shut up the court-gates.

RODERIGO. Why, sir? What 's the danger?

ANTONIO. Shut up the posterns presently, and call All the officers o' th' court.

GRISOLAN. I shall instantly.

[Exit.]

ANTONIO. Who keeps the key o' th' park-gate?

RODERIGO. Forobosco.

ANTONIO. Let him bring 't presently.

⁴⁵ A hall in the same palace.

⁴⁶ Crossness.

⁴⁷ Always.

[Re-enter GRISOLAN with Servants]

FIRST SERVANT. O, gentleman o' th' court, the foulest treason!

BOSOLA. [Aside.] If that these apri-cocks should be poison'd now,
Without my knowledge?

FIRST SERVANT.

There was taken even now a Switzer in the duchess' bed-chamber —

SECOND SERVANT. A Switzer!

FIRST SERVANT. With a pistol —

SECOND SERVANT. There was a cunning traitor!

FIRST SERVANT.

And all the moulds of his buttons were leaden bullets.

SECOND SERVANT. O wicked cannibal!

FIRST SERVANT. 'Twas a French plot, upon my life.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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