

FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

LOVE AND INTRIGUE

Friedrich Schiller

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Love and Intrigue: A Tragedy

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PRESIDENT VON WALTER, Prime Minister in the Court of a German Prince.

FERDINAND, his son; a Major in the Army; in love with Louisa Miller.

BARON VON KALB, Court Marshal (or Chamberlain).

WORM, Private Secretary to the President.

MILLER, the Town Musician, and Teacher of Music.

MRS. MILLER, his wife.

LOUISA, the daughter of Miller, in love with Ferdinand.

LADY MILFORD, the Prince's Mistress.

SOPHY, attendant on Lady Milford.

An old Valet in the service of the Prince.

Officers, Attendants, etc.

ACT I

SCENE I

MILLER – MRS. MILLER.

MILLER (walking quickly up and down the room). Once for all! The affair is becoming serious. My daughter and the baron will soon be the town-talk – my house lose its character – the president will get wind of it, and – the short and long of the matter is, I'll show the youngster the door.

MRS MILLER. You did not entice him to your house – did not thrust your daughter upon him!

MILLER. Didn't entice him to my house – didn't thrust the girl upon him! Who'll believe me? I was master of my own house. I ought to have taken more care of my daughter. I should have bundled the major out at once, or have gone straight to his excellency, his papa, and disclosed all. The young baron will get off merely with a snubbing, I know that well enough, and all the blame will fall upon the fiddler.

MRS MILLER (sipping her coffee). Pooh! nonsense! How can it fall upon you? What have people to do with you? You follow your profession, and pick up pupils wherever you can find them.

MILLER. All very fine, but please to tell me what will be the upshot of the whole affair? He can't marry the girl – marriage is out of the question, and to make her his – God help us! "Good-by t'ye!" No, no – when such a sprig of nobility has been nibbling here and there and everywhere, and has glutted himself with the devil knows what all, of course it will be a relish to my young gentleman to get a mouthful of sweet water. Take heed! Take heed! If you were dotted with eyes, and could place a sentinel for every hair of your head, he'll bamboozle her under your very nose; add one to her reckoning, take himself off, and the girl's ruined for life, left in the lurch, or, having once tasted the trade, will carry it on. (Striking his forehead.) Oh, horrible thought!

MRS MILLER. God in his mercy protect us!

MILLER. We shall want his protection. You may well say that. What other object can such a scapegrace have? The girl is handsome – well made – can show a pretty foot. How the upper story is furnished matters little. That's blinked in you women if nature has not played the niggard in other respects. Let this harum-scarum but turn over this chapter – ho! ho! his eyes will glisten like Rodney's when he got scent of a French frigate; then up with all sail and at her, and I don't blame him for it – flesh is flesh. I know that very well.

MRS MILLER. You should only read the beautiful billy-doux which the baron writes to your daughter. Gracious me! Why it's as clear as the sun at noonday that he loves her purely for her virtuous soul.

MILLER. That's the right strain! We beat the sack, but mean the ass's back. He who wishes to pay his respects to the flesh needs only a kind heart for a go-between. What did I myself? When we've once so far cleared the ground that the affections cry ready! slap! the bodies follow their example, the appetites are obedient, and the silver moon kindly plays the pimp.

MRS MILLER. And then only think of the beautiful books that the major has sent us. Your daughter always prays out of them.

MILLER (whistles). Prays! You've hit the mark. The plain, simple food of nature is much too raw and indigestible for this macaroni gentleman's stomach. It must be cooked for him artificially in the infernal pestilential pitcher of your novel-writers. Into the fire with the rubbish! I shall have the girl taking up with – God knows what all – about heavenly fooleries that will get into her blood, like Spanish flies, and scatter to the winds the handful of Christianity that cost her father so much trouble to keep together. Into the fire with them I say! The girl will take the devil's own nonsense

into her head; amidst the dreams of her fool's paradise she'll not know her own home, but forget and feel ashamed of her father, the music-master; and, lastly, I shall lose a worthy, honest son-in-law who might have nestled himself so snugly into my connections. No! damn it! (Jumps up in a passion.) I'll break the neck of it at once, and the major – yes, yes, the major! shall be shown where the carpenter made the door. (Going.)

MRS MILLER. Be civil, Miller! How many a bright shilling have his presents —

MILLER (comes back, and goes up to her). The blood money of my daughter? To Beelzebub with thee, thou infamous bawd! Sooner will I vagabondize with my violin and fiddle for a bit of bread – sooner will I break to pieces my instrument and carry dung on the sounding-board than taste a mouthful earned by my only child at the price of her soul and future happiness. Give up your cursed coffee and snuff-taking, and there will be no need to carry your daughter's face to market. I have always had my bellyful and a good shirt to my back before this confounded scamp put his nose into my crib.

MRS MILLER. Now don't be so ready to pitch the house out of window. How you flare up all of a sudden. I only meant to say that we shouldn't offend the major, because he is the son of the president.

MILLER. There lies the root of the mischief. For that reason – for that very reason the thing must be put a stop to this very day! The president, if he is a just and upright father, will give me his thanks. You must brush up my red plush, and I will go straight to his excellency. I shall say to him, – "Your excellency's son has an eye to my daughter; my daughter is not good enough to be your excellency's son's wife, but too good to be your excellency's son's strumpet, and there's an end of the matter. My name is Miller."

SCENE II

Enter SECRETARY WORM.

MRS MILLER. Ah! Good morning, Mr. Seckertary! Have we indeed the pleasure of seeing you again?

WORM. All on my side – on my side, cousin Miller! Where a high-born cavalier's visits are received mine can be of no account whatever.

MRS MILLER. How can you think so, Mr. Seckertary? His lordship the baron, Major Ferdinand, certainly does us the honor to look in now and then; but, for all that, we don't undervalue others.

MILLER (vexed). A chair, wife, for the gentleman! Be seated, kinsman.

WORM (lays aside hat and stick, and seats himself). Well, well – and how then is my future – or past – bride? I hope she'll not be – may I not have the honor of seeing – Miss Louisa?

MRS MILLER. Thanks for inquiries, Mr. Seckertary, but my daughter is not at all proud.

MILLER (angry, jogs her with his elbow). Woman!

MRS MILLER. Sorry she can't have that honor, Mr. Seckertary. My daughter is now at mass.

WORM. I am glad to hear it, – glad to hear it. I shall have in her a pious, Christian wife!

MRS MILLER (smiling in a stupidly affected manner). Yes – but, Mr. Seckertary —

MILLER (greatly incensed, pulls her ears). Woman!

MRS MILLER. If our family can serve you in any other way – with the greatest pleasure, Mr. Seckertary —

WORM (frowning angrily). In any other way? Much obliged! much obliged! – hm! hm! hm!

MRS MILLER. But, as you yourself must see, Mr. Seckertary —

MILLER (in a rage, shaking his fist at her). Woman!

MRS MILLER. Good is good, and better is better, and one does not like to stand between fortune and one's only child (with vulgar pride). You understand me, Mr. Seckertary?

WORM. Understand. Not exac – . Oh, yes. But what do you really mean?

MRS MILLER. Why – why – I only think – I mean – (coughs). Since then Providence has determined to make a great lady of my daughter —

WORM (jumping from his chair). What's that you say? what?

MILLER. Keep your seat, keep your seat, Mr. Secretary! The woman's an out-and-out fool! Where's the great lady to come from? How you show your donkey's ears by talking such stuff.

MRS MILLER. Scold as long as you will. I know what I know, and what the major said he said.

MILLER (snatches up his fiddle in anger). Will you hold your tongue? Shall I throw my fiddle at your head? What can you know? What can he have said? Take no notice of her clack, kinsman! Away with you to your kitchen! You'll not think me first cousin of a fool, and that I'm looking out so high for the girl? You'll not think that of me, Mr. Secretary?

WORM. Nor have I deserved it of you, Mr. Miller! You have always shown yourself a man of your word, and my contract to your daughter was as good as signed. I hold an office that will maintain a thrifty manager; the president befriends me; the door to advancement is open to me whenever I may choose to take advantage of it. You see that my intentions towards Miss Louisa are serious; if you have been won over by a fop of rank —

MRS MILLER. Mr. Seckertary! more respect, I beg —

MILLER. Hold your tongue, I say. Never mind her, kinsman. Things remain as they were. The answer I gave you last harvest, I repeat to-day. I'll not force my daughter. If you suit her, well and good; then it's for her to see that she can be happy with you. If she shakes her head – still better – be it so, I should say – then you must be content to pocket the refusal, and part in good fellowship

over a bottle with her father. 'Tis the girl who is to live with you – not I. Why should I, out of sheer caprice, fasten a husband upon the girl for whom she has no inclination? That the evil one may haunt me down like a wild beast in my old age – that in every drop I drink – in every bit of bread I bite, I might swallow the bitter reproach: Thou art the villain who destroyed his child's happiness!

MRS MILLER. The short and the long of it is – I refuse my consent downright; my daughter's intended for a lofty station, and I'll go to law if my husband is going to be talked over.

MILLER. Shall I break every bone in your body, you millclack?

WORM (to MILLER). Paternal advice goes a great way with the daughter, and I hope you know me, Mr. Miller?

MILLER. Plague take you! 'Tis the girl must know you. What an old crabstick like me can see in you is just the very last thing that a dainty young girl wants. I'll tell you to a hair if you're the man for an orchestra – but a woman's heart is far too deep for a music-master. And then, to be frank with you – you know that I'm a blunt, straightforward fellow – you'll not give thank'ye for my advice. I'll persuade my daughter to no one – but from you Mr. Sec – I would dissuade her! A lover who calls upon the father for help – with permission – is not worth a pinch of snuff. If he has anything in him, he'll be ashamed to take that old-fashioned way of making his deserts known to his sweetheart. If he hasn't the courage, why he's a milksop, and no Louisas were born for the like of him. No! he must carry on his commerce with the daughter behind the father's back. He must manage so to win her heart, that she would rather wish both father and mother at Old Harry than give him up – or that she come herself, fall at her father's feet, and implore either for death on the rack, or the only one of her heart. That's the fellow for me! that I call love! and he who can't bring matters to that pitch with a petticoat may – stick the goose feather in his cap.

WORM (seizes hat and stick and hurries out of the room). Much obliged, Mr. Miller!

MILLER (going after him slowly). For what? for what? You haven't taken anything, Mr. Secretary! (Comes back.) He won't hear, and off he's gone. The very sight of that quill-driver is like poison and brimstone to me. An ugly, contraband knave, smuggled into the world by some lewd prank of the devil – with his malicious little pig's eyes, foxy hair, and nut-cracker chin, just as if Nature, enraged at such a bungled piece of goods, had seized the ugly monster by it, and flung him aside. No! rather than throw away my daughter on a vagabond like him, she may – God forgive me!

MRS MILLER. The wretch! – but you'll be made to keep a clean tongue in your head!

MILLER. Ay, and you too, with your pestilential baron – you, too, must put my bristles up. You're never more stupid than when you have the most occasion to show a little sense. What's the meaning of all that trash about your daughter being a great lady? If it's to be cried out about the town to-morrow, you need only let that fellow get scent of it. He is one of your worthies who go sniffing about into people's houses, dispute upon everything, and, if a slip of the tongue happen to you, skurry with it straight to the prince, mistress, and minister, and then there's the devil to pay.

SCENE III

Enter LOUISA with a book in her hand.

LOUISA. Good morning, dear father!

MILLER (affectionately). Bless thee, my Louisa! I rejoice to see thy thoughts are turned so diligently to thy Creator. Continue so, and his arm will support thee.

LOUISA. Oh! I am a great sinner, father! Was he not here, mother?

MRS MILLER. Who, my child?

LOUISA. Ah! I forgot that there are others in the world besides him – my head wanders so. Was he not here? Ferdinand?

MILLER (with melancholy, serious voice). I thought my Louisa had forgotten that name in her devotions?

LOUISA (after looking at him steadfastly for some time). I understand you, father. I feel the knife which stabs my conscience; but it comes too late. I can no longer pray, father. Heaven and Ferdinand divide my bleeding soul, and I fear – I fear – (after a pause). Yet no, no, good father. The painter is best praised when we forget him in the contemplation of his picture. When in the contemplation of his masterpiece, my delight makes me forget the Creator, – is not that, father, the true praise of God?

MILLER (throws himself in displeasure on a chair). There we have it! Those are the fruits of your ungodly reading.

LOUISA (uneasy, goes to the window). Where can he be now? Ah! the high-born ladies who see him – listen to him – I am a poor forgotten maiden. (Startles at that word, and rushes to her father.) But no, no! forgive me. I do not repine at my lot. I ask but little – to think on him – that can harm no one. Ah! that I might breathe out this little spark of life in one soft fondling zephyr to cool his cheek! That this fragile floweret, youth, were a violet, on which he might tread, and I die modestly beneath his feet! I ask no more, father! Can the proud, majestic day-star punish the gnat for basking in its rays?

MILLER (deeply affected, leans on the arm of his chair, and covers his face). My child, my child, with joy would I sacrifice the remnant of my days hadst thou never seen the major.

LOUISA (terrified.) How; how? What did you say? No, no! that could not be your meaning, good father. You know not that Ferdinand is mine! You know not that God created him for me, and for my delight alone! (After a pause of recollection.) The first moment that I beheld him – and the blood rushed into my glowing cheeks – every pulse beat with joy; every throb told me, every breath whispered, "'Tis he!" And my heart, recognizing the long-desired one, repeated "'Tis he!" And the whole world was as one melodious echo of my delight! Then – oh! then was the first dawning of my soul! A thousand new sentiments arose in my bosom, as flowers arise from the earth when spring approaches. I forgot there was a world, yet never had I felt that world so dear to me! I forgot there was a God, yet never had I so loved him!

MILLER (runs to her and clasps her to his bosom). Louisa! my beloved, my admirable child! Do what thou wilt. Take all – all – my life – the baron – God is my witness – him I can never give thee! [Exit.

LOUISA. Nor would I have him now, father! Time on earth is but a stinted dewdrop in the ocean of eternity. 'Twill swiftly glide in one delicious dream of Ferdinand. I renounce him for this life! But then, mother – then when the bounds of separation are removed – when the hated distinctions of rank no longer part us – when men will be only men – I shall bring nothing with me save my innocence! Yet often has my father told me that at the Almighty's coming riches and titles will be worthless; and that hearts alone will be beyond all price. Oh! then shall I be rich! There, tears will be

reckoned for triumphs, and purity of soul be preferred to an illustrious ancestry. Then, then, mother, shall I be noble! In what will he then be superior to the girl of his heart?

MRS. MILLER (starts from her seat). Louisa! the baron! He is jumping over the fence! Where shall I hide myself?

LOUISA (begins to tremble). Oh! do not leave me, mother!

MRS MILLER. Mercy! What a figure I am. I am quite ashamed! I cannot let his lordship see me in this state!

[Exit

SCENE IV

LOUISA – FERDINAND. (He flies towards her – she falls back into her chair, pale and trembling. He remains standing before her – they look at each other for some moments in silence. A pause.)

FERDINAND. So pale, Louisa?

LOUISA (rising, and embracing him). It is nothing – nothing now that you are here – it is over.

FERDINAND (takes her hand and raises it to his lips). And does my Louisa still love me? My heart is yesterday's; is thine the same? I flew hither to see if thou wert happy, that I might return and be so too. But I find thee whelmed in sorrow!

LOUISA. Not so, my beloved, not so!

FERDINAND. Confess, Louisa! you are not happy. I see through your soul as clearly as through the transparent lustre of this brilliant. No spot can harbor here unmarked by me – no thought can cloud your brow that does not reach your lover's heart. Whence comes this grief? Tell me, I beseech you! Ah! could I feel assured this mirror still remained unsullied, there'd seem to me no cloud in all the universe! Tell me, dear Louisa, what afflicts you?

LOUISA (looking at him with anxiety for a few moments). Ferdinand! couldst thou but know how such discourse exalts the tradesman's daughter —

FERDINAND (surprised). What say'st thou? Tell me, girl! how camest thou by that thought? Thou art my Louisa! who told thee thou couldst be aught else? See, false one, see, for what coldness I must chide thee! Were indeed thy whole soul absorbed by love for me, never hadst thou found time to draw comparisons! When I am with thee, my prudence is lost in one look from thine eyes: when I am absent in a dream of thee! But thou – thou canst harbor prudence in the sane breast with love! Fie on thee! Every moment bestowed on this sorrow was a robbery from affection and from me!

LOUISA (pressing his hand and shaking her head with a melancholy air). Ferdinand, you would lull my apprehensions to sleep; you would divert my eyes from the precipice into which I am falling. I can see the future! The voice of honor – your prospects, your father's anger – my nothingness. (Shuddering and suddenly drops his hands.) Ferdinand! a sword hangs over us! They would separate us!

FERDINAND (jumps up). Separate us! Whence these apprehensions, Louisa? Who can rend the bonds that bind two hearts, or separate the tones of one accord? True, I am a nobleman – but show me that my patent of nobility is older than the eternal laws of the universe – or my escutcheon more valid than the handwriting of heaven in my Louisa's eyes? "This woman is for this man?" I am son of the prime minister. For that very reason, what but love can soften the curses which my father's extortions from the country will entail upon me?

LOUISA. Oh! how I fear that father!

FERDINAND. I fear nothing – nothing but that your affection should know bounds. Let obstacles rise between us, huge as mountains, I will look upon them as a ladder by which to fly into the arms of my Louisa! The tempest of opposing fate shall but fan the flame of my affection dangers will only serve to make Louisa yet more charming. Then speak no more of terrors, my love! I myself – I will watch over thee carefully as the enchanter's dragon watches over buried gold. Trust thyself to me! thou shalt need no other angel. I will throw myself between thee and fate – for thee receive each wound. For thee will I catch each drop distilled from the cup of joy, and bring thee in the bowl of love. (Embracing affectionately.) This arm shall support my Louisa through life. Fairer than it dismissed thee, shall heaven receive thee back, and confess with delight that love alone can give perfection to the soul.

LOUISA (disengaging herself from him, greatly agitated). No more! I beseech thee, Ferdinand! no more! Couldst thou know. Oh! leave me, leave me! Little dost thou feel how these hopes rend my heart in pieces like fiends! (Going.)

FERDINAND (detaining her). Stay, Louisa! stay! Why this agitation? Why those anxious looks?

LOUISA. I had forgotten these dreams, and was happy. Now – now – from this day is the tranquillity of my heart no more. Wild impetuous wishes will torment my bosom! Go! God forgive thee! Thou hast hurled a firebrand into my young peaceful heart which nothing can extinguish! (She breaks from him, and rushes from the apartment, followed by FERDINAND.)

SCENE V. – A Chamber in the PRESIDENT.'S House

The PRESIDENT, with the grand order of the cross about his neck,
and a star at his breast – SECRETARY WORM.

PRESIDENT. A serious attachment, say you? No, no, Worm; that I never can believe.

WORM. If your excellency pleases, I will bring proofs of my assertions.

PRESIDENT. That he has a fancy for the wench – flatters her – and, if you will, pretends to love her – all this is very possible – nay – excusable – but – and the daughter of a musician, you say?

WORM. Of Miller, the music-master.

PRESIDENT. Handsome? But that, of course.

WORM (with warmth). A most captivating and lovely blondine, who, without saying too much, might figure advantageously beside the greatest beauties of the court.

PRESIDENT (laughs). It's very plain, Worm, that you have an eye upon the jade yourself – I see that. But listen, Worm. That my son has a passion for the fair sex gives me hope that he will find favor with the ladies. He may make his way at court. The girl is handsome, you say; I am glad to think my son has taste. Can he deceive the silly wench by holding out honorable intentions – still better; it will show that he is shrewd enough to play the hypocrite when it serves his purpose. He may become prime minister – if he accomplishes his purpose! Admirable! that will prove to me that fortune favors him. Should the farce end with a chubby grandchild – incomparable! I will drink an extra bottle of Malaga to the prospects of my pedigree, and cheerfully pay the wench's lying-in expenses.

WORM. All I wish is that your excellency may not have to drink that bottle to drown your sorrow.

PRESIDENT (sternly). Worm! remember that what I once believe, I believe obstinately – that I am furious when angered. I am willing to pass over as a joke this attempt to stir my blood. That you are desirous of getting rid of your rival, I can very well comprehend, and that, because you might have some difficulty in supplanting the son, you endeavor to make a cat's-paw of the father, I can also understand – I am even delighted to find that you are master of such excellent qualifications in the way of roguery. Only, friend Worm, pray don't make me, too, the butt of your knavery. Understand me, have a care that your cunning trench not upon my plans!

WORM. Pardon me, your excellency! If even – as you suspect – jealousy is concerned, it is only with the eye, and not with the tongue.

PRESIDENT. It would be better to dispense with it altogether. What can it matter to you, simpleton, whether you get your coin fresh from the mint, or it comes through a banker? Console yourself with the example of our nobility. Whether known to the bridegroom or not, I can assure you that, amongst us of rank, scarcely a marriage takes place but what at least half a dozen of the guests – or the footmen – can state the geometrical area of the bridegroom's paradise.

WORM (bowing). My lord! Upon this head I confess myself a plebeian.

PRESIDENT. And, besides, you may soon have the satisfaction of turning the laugh most handsomely against your rival. At this very moment it is under consideration in the cabinet, that, upon the arrival of the new duchess, Lady Milford shall apparently be discarded, and, to complete the deception, form an alliance. You know, Worm, how greatly my influence depends upon this lady – how my mightiest prospects hang upon the passions of the prince. The duke is now seeking a partner for Lady Milford. Some one else may step in – conclude the bargain for her ladyship, win the confidence of the prince, and make himself indispensable, to my cost. Now, to retain the prince in the meshes of my family, I have resolved that my Ferdinand shall marry Lady Milford. Is that clear to you?

WORM. Quite dazzling! Your excellency has at least convinced me that, compared with the president, the father is but a novice. Should the major prove as obedient a son as you show yourself a tender father, your demand may chance to be returned with a protest.

PRESIDENT. Fortunately I have never yet had to fear opposition to my will when once I have pronounced, "It shall be so!" But now, Worm, that brings us back to our former subject! I will propose Lady Milford to my son this very day. The face which he puts upon it shall either confirm your suspicions or entirely confute them.

WORM. Pardon me, my lord! The sullen face which he most assuredly will put upon it may be placed equally to the account of the bride you offer to him as of her from whom you wish to separate him. I would beg of you a more positive test! Propose to him some perfectly unexceptionable woman. Then, if he consents, let Secretary Worm break stones on the highway for the next three years.

PRESIDENT (biting his lips). The devil!

WORM. Such is the case, you may rest assured! The mother – stupidity itself – has, in her simplicity, betrayed all to me.

PRESIDENT (pacing the room, and trying to repress his rage). Good! this very morning, then!

WORM. Yet, let me entreat your excellency not to forget that the major – is my master's son —

PRESIDENT. No harm shall come to him, Worm.

WORM. And that my service in ridding you of an unwelcome daughter-in-law —

PRESIDENT. Should be rewarded by me helping you to a wife? That too, Worm!

WORM (bowing with delight). Eternally your lordship's slave. (Going.)

PRESIDENT (threatening him). As to what I have confided to you, Worm! If you dare but to whisper a syllable —

WORM (laughs). Then your excellency will no doubt expose my forgeries!

[Exit.

PRESIDENT. Yes, yes, you are safe enough! I hold you in the fetters of your own knavery, like a trout on the hook!

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT. Marshal Kalb —

PRESIDENT. The very man I wished to see. Introduce him.

[Exit SERVANT.

SCENE VI

MARSHAL KALB, in a rich but tasteless court-dress, with Chamberlain's keys, two watches, sword, three-cornered hat, and hair dressed a la Herisson. He bustles up to the PRESIDENT, and diffuses a strong scent of musk through the whole theatre – PRESIDENT.

MARSHAL. Ah! good morning, my dear baron! Quite delighted to see you again – pray forgive my not having paid my respects to you at an earlier hour – the most pressing business – the duke's bill of fare – invitation cards – arrangements for the sledge party to-day – ah! – besides it was necessary for me to be at the levee, to inform his highness of the state of the weather.

PRESIDENT. True, marshal! Such weighty concerns were not to be neglected!

MARSHAL. Then a rascally tailor, too, kept me waiting for him!

PRESIDENT. And yet ready to the moment?

MARSHAL. Nor is that all! One misfortune follows at the heels of the other to-day! Only hear me!

PRESIDENT (absent). Can it be possible?

MARSHAL. Just listen! Scarce had I quitted my carriage, when the horses became restive, and began to plunge and rear – only imagine! – splashed my breeches all over with mud! What was to be done? Fancy, my dear baron, just fancy yourself for a moment in my predicament! There I stood! the hour was late! a day's journey to return – yet to appear before his highness in this – good heavens! What did I bethink me of? I pretended to faint! They bundle me into my carriage! I drive home like mad – change my dress – hasten back – and only think! – in spite of all this I was the first person in the antechamber! What say you to that?

PRESIDENT. A most admirable impromptu of mortal wit – but tell me, Kalb, did you speak to the duke?

MARSHAL (importantly). Full twenty minutes and a half.

PRESIDENT. Indeed? Then doubtless you have important news to impart to me?

MARSHAL (seriously, after a pause of reflection). His highness wears a Merde d'Oye beaver to-day.

PRESIDENT. God bless me! – and yet, marshal, I have even greater news to tell you. Lady Milford will soon become my daughter-in-law. That, I think will be new to you?

MARSHAL. Is it possible! And is it already agreed upon?

PRESIDENT. It is settled, marshal – and you would oblige me by forthwith waiting upon her ladyship, and preparing her to receive Ferdinand's visit. You have full liberty, also, to circulate the news of my son's approaching nuptials.

MARSHAL. My dear friend! With consummate pleasure! What can I desire more? I fly to the baroness this moment. Adieu! (Embracing him.) In less than three-quarters of an hour it shall be known throughout the town. [Skips off.]

PRESIDENT (smiling contemptuously). How can people say that such creatures are of no use in the world? Now, then, Master Ferdinand must either consent or give the whole town the lie. (Rings – WORM enters.) Send my son hither. (WORM retires; the PRESIDENT walks up and down, full of thought.)

SCENE VII

PRESIDENT – FERDINAND.

FERDINAND. In obedience to your commands, sir —

PRESIDENT. Ay, if I desire the presence of my son, I must command it – Ferdinand, I have observed you for some time past, and find no longer that open vivacity of youth which once so delighted me. An unusual sorrow broods upon your features; you shun your father; you shun society. For shame, Ferdinand! At your age a thousand irregularities are easier forgiven than one instant of idle melancholy. Leave this to me, my son! Leave the care of your future happiness to my direction, and study only to co-operate with my designs – come, Ferdinand, embrace me!

FERDINAND. You are most gracious to-day, father!

PRESIDENT. "To-day," you rogue? and your "to-day" with such a vinegar look? (Seriously.) Ferdinand! For whose sake have I trod that dangerous path which leads to the affections of the prince? For whose sake have I forever destroyed my peace with Heaven and my conscience? Hear me, Ferdinand – I am speaking to my son. For whom have I paved the way by the removal of my predecessor? a deed which the more deeply gores my inward feelings the more carefully I conceal the dagger from the world! Tell me, Ferdinand, for whose sake have I done all this?

FERDINAND (recoiling with horror). Surely not for mine, father, not for mine? Surely not on me can fall the bloody reflection of this murder? By my Almighty Maker, it were better never to have been born than to be the pretext for such a crime!

PRESIDENT. What sayest thou? How? But I will attribute these strange notions to thy romantic brain, Ferdinand; let me not lose my temper – ungrateful boy! Thus dost thou repay me for my sleepless nights? Thus for my restless anxiety to promote thy good? Thus for the never-dying scorpion of my conscience? Upon me must fall the burden of responsibility; upon me the curse, the thunderbolt of the Judge. Thou receivest thy fortune from another's hand – the crime is not attached to the inheritance.

FERDINAND (extending his right hand towards heaven). Here I solemnly abjure an inheritance which must ever remind me of a parent's guilt!

PRESIDENT. Hear me, sirrah! and do not incense me! Were you left to your own direction you would crawl through life in the dust.

FERDINAND. Oh! better, father, far, far better, than to crawl about a throne!

PRESIDENT (repressing his anger). So! Then compulsion must make you sensible of your good fortune! To that point, which, with the utmost striving a thousand others fail to reach, you have been exalted in your very sleep. At twelve you received a commission; at twenty a command. I have succeeded in obtaining for you the duke's patronage. He bids you lay aside your uniform, and share with me his favor and his confidence. He spoke of titles – embassies – of honors bestowed but upon few. A glorious prospect spreads itself before you! The direct path to the place next the throne lies open to you! Nay, to the throne itself, if the actual power of ruling is equivalent to the mere symbol. Does not that idea awaken your ambition?

FERDINAND. No! My ideas of greatness and happiness differ widely from yours. Your happiness is but seldom known, except by the misery of others. Envy, terror, hatred are the melancholy mirrors in which the smiles of princes are reflected. Tears, curses, and the wailings of despair, the horrid banquet that feasts your supposed elect of fortune; intoxicated with these they rush headlong into eternity, staggering to the throne of judgment. My ideas of happiness teach me to look for its fountain in myself! All my wishes lie centered in my heart!

PRESIDENT. Masterly! Inimitable! Admirable! The first schooling I have received these thirty years! Pity that the brain at fifty should be so dull at learning! But – that such talent may not rust, I

will place one by your side on whom you can practise your harlequinade follies at pleasure. You will resolve – resolve this very day – to take a wife.

FERDINAND (starting back amazed). Father!

PRESIDENT. Answer me not. I have made proposals, in your name, to Lady Milford. You will instantly determine upon going to her, and declaring yourself her bridegroom.

FERDINAND. Lady Milford! father?

PRESIDENT. I presume she is not unknown to you!

FERDINAND (passionately). To what brothel is she unknown through the dukedom? But pardon me, dearest father! It is ridiculous to imagine that your proposal can be serious. Would you call yourself father of that infamous son who married a licensed prostitute?

PRESIDENT. Nay, more. I would ask her hand myself, if she would take a man of fifty. Would not you call yourself that infamous father's son?

FERDINAND. No! as God lives! that would I not!

PRESIDENT. An audacity, by my honor! which I pardon for its excessive singularity.

FERDINAND. I entreat you, father, release me from a demand which would render it insupportable to call myself your son.

PRESIDENT. Are you distracted, boy? What reasonable man would not thirst after a distinction which makes him, as one of a trio, the equal and co-partner of his sovereign?

FERDINAND. You are quite an enigma to me, father! "A distinction," do you call it? A distinction to share that with a prince, wherein he places himself on a level with the meanest of his subjects? (The PRESIDENT bursts into a loud laugh.) You may scoff – I must submit to it in a father. With what countenance should I support the gaze of the meanest laborer, who at least receives an undivided person as the portion of his bride? With what countenance should I present myself before the world? before the prince? nay, before the harlot herself, who seeks to wash out in my shame the landmarks of her honor?

PRESIDENT. Where in the world couldst thou collect such notions, boy?

FERDINAND. I implore you, father, by heaven and earth! By thus sacrificing your only son you can never become so happy as you will make him miserable! If my life can be a step to your advancement, dispose of it. My life you gave me; and I will never hesitate a moment to sacrifice it wholly to your welfare. But my honor, father! If you deprive me of this, the giving me life was a mere trick of wanton cruelty, and I must equally curse the parent and the pander.

PRESIDENT (tapping him on the shoulder in a friendly manner). That's as it should be, my dear boy! Now I see that you are a brave and noble fellow, and worthy of the first woman in the dukedom. You shall have her. This very day you shall be affianced to the Countess of Ostheim.

FERDINAND (in new disorder). Is this, then, destined to be the hour of my destruction?

PRESIDENT (regarding him with an eye of suspicion). In this union, I imagine, you can have no objection on the score of honor?

FERDINAND. None, father, none whatever. Frederica of Ostheim would make any other the happiest of men. (Aside, in the greatest agitation.) His kindness rends in pieces that remnant of my heart which his cruelty left unwounded.

PRESIDENT (his eye still fixed upon him). I expect your gratitude, Ferdinand!

FERDINAND (rushes towards him and kisses his hands). Father, your goodness awakens every spark of sentiment in my bosom. Father! receive my warmest thanks for your kind intentions. Your choice is unexceptionable! But I cannot – I dare not – pity me, father, I never can love the countess.

PRESIDENT (draws back). Ha! ha! now I've caught you, young gentleman! The cunning fox has tumbled into the trap. Oh, you artful hypocrite! It was not then honor which made you refuse Lady Milford? It was not the woman, but the nuptials which alarmed you! (FERDINAND stands petrified for a moment; then recovers himself and prepares to quit the chamber hastily.) Whither now? Stay, sir. Is this the respect due to your father? (FERDINAND returns slowly.) Her ladyship

expects you. The duke has my promise! Both court and city believe all is settled. If thou makest me appear a liar, boy! If, before the duke – the lady – the court and city – thou shouldst make me appear a liar! – tremble, boy! – or when I have gained information of certain circumstances – how now? Why does the color so suddenly forsake your cheeks?



FERDINAND (pale and trembling). How? What? Nothing – it is nothing, my father!

PRESIDENT (casting upon him a dreadful look). Should there be cause. If I should discover the source whence this obstinacy proceeds! Boy! boy! the very suspicion drives me distracted! Leave me this moment. 'Tis now the hour of parade. As soon as the word is given, go thou to her ladyship. At my nod a dukedom trembles; we shall see whether a disobedient son dare dispute my will! (Going, returns.) Remember, sir! fail not to wait on Lady Milford, or dread my anger!

[Exit.

FERDINAND (awakens, as if from a dream). Is he gone? Was that a father's voice? Yes, I will go – I will see her – I will say such things to her – hold such a mirror before her eyes. Then, base woman, shouldst thou still demand my hand – in the presence of the assembled nobles, the military, and the people – gird thyself with all the pride of thy native Britain – I, a German youth, will spurn thee!

[Exit.

ACT II

SCENE I. – A room in LADY MILFORD'S house.

On the right of the stage stands a sofa, on the left a pianoforte.

LADY MILFORD, in a loose but elegant negligee, is running her hand over the keys of the pianoforte as SOPHY advances from the window.

SOPHY. The parade is over, and the officers are separating, but I see no signs of the major.

LADY MILFORD (rises and walks up and down the room in visible agitation). I know not what ails me to-day, Sophy! I never felt so before – you say you do not see him! It is evident enough that he is by no means impatient for this meeting – my heart feels oppressed as if by some heavy crime. Go! Sophy, order the most spirited horse in the stable to be saddled for me – I must away into the open air where I may look on the blue sky and hear the busy hum of man. I must dispel this gloominess by change and motion.

SOPHY. If you feel out of spirits, my lady, why not invite company! Let the prince give an entertainment here, or have the ombre table brought to you. If the prince and all his court were at my beck and call I would let no whim or fancy trouble me!

LADY MILFORD (throwing herself on the couch). Pray, spare me. I would gladly give a jewel in exchange for every hour's respite from the infliction of such company! I always have my rooms tapestried with these creatures! Narrow-minded, miserable beings, who are quite shocked if by chance a candid and heartfelt word should escape one's lips! and stand aghast as though they saw an apparition; slaves, moved by a single puppet-wire, which I can govern as easily as the threads of my embroidery! What can I have in common with such insipid wretches, whose souls, like their watches, are regulated by machinery? What pleasure can I have in the society of people whose answers to my questions I know beforehand? How can I hold communion with men who dare not venture on an opinion of their own lest it should differ from mine! Away with them – I care not to ride a horse that has not spirit enough to champ the bit! (Goes to the window.)

SOPHY. But surely, my lady, you except the prince, the handsomest, the wittiest, and the most gallant man in all his duchy.

LADY MILFORD (returning). Yes, in his duchy, that was well said – and it is only a royal duchy, Sophy, that could in the least excuse my weakness. You say the world envies me! Poor thing! It should rather pity me! Believe me, of all who drink of the streams of royal bounty there is none more miserable than the sovereign's favorite, for he who is great and mighty in the eyes of others comes to her but as the humble suppliant! It is true that by the talisman of his greatness he can realize every wish of my heart as readily as the magician calls forth the fairy palace from the depths of the earth! He can place the luxuries of both Indies upon my table, turn the barren wilderness to a paradise, can bid the broad rivers of his land play in triumphal arches over my path, or expend all the hard-earned gains of his subjects in a single feu-de-joie to my honor. But can he school his heart to respond to one great or ardent emotion? Can he extort one noble thought from his weak and indigent brain? Alas! my heart is thirsting amid all this ocean of splendor; what avail, then, a thousand virtuous sentiments when I am only permitted to indulge in the pleasures of the senses.

SOPHY (regarding her with surprise). Dear lady, you amaze me! how long is it since I entered your service?

LADY MILFORD. Do you ask because this is the first day on which you have learnt to know me? I have sold my honor to the prince, it is true, but my heart is still my own – a heart, dear Sophy, which even yet may be worth the acceptance of an honorable man – a heart over which the

pestilential blast of courtly corruption has passed as the breath which for a moment dims the mirror's lustre. Believe me my spirit would long since have revolted against this miserable thralldom could my ambition have submitted to see another advanced to my place.

SOPHY. And could a heart like yours so readily surrender itself to mere ambition?

LADY MILFORD (with energy). Has it not already been avenged? nay, is it not even at this very moment making me pay a heavy atonement (with emphasis laying her hand on SOPHY'S shoulder)? Believe me, Sophy, woman has but to choose between ruling and serving, but the utmost joy of power is a worthless possession if the mightier joy of being slave to the man we love be denied us.

SOPHY. A truth, dear lady, which I could least of all have expected to hear from your lips!

LADY MILFORD. And wherefore, Sophy? Does not woman show, by her childish mode of swaying the sceptre of power, that she is only fit to go in leading-strings! Have not my fickle humors – my eager pursuit of wild dissipation – betrayed to you that I sought in these to stifle the still wilder throbbings of my heart?

SOPHY (starting back with surprise). This from you, my lady?

LADY MILFORD (continuing with increasing energy). Appease these throbbings. Give me the man in whom my thoughts are centered – the man I adore, without whom life were worse than death. Let me but hear from his lips that the tears of love with which my eyes are bedewed outvie the gems that sparkle in my hair, and I will throw at the feet of the prince his heart and his dukedom, and flee to the uttermost parts of the earth with the man of my love!

SOPHY (looking at her in alarm). Heavens! my lady! control your emotion —

LADY MILFORD (in surprise). You change color! To what have I given utterance? Yet, since I have said thus much, let me say still more – let my confidence be a pledge of your fidelity, – I will tell you all.

SOPHY (looking anxiously around). I fear my lady – I dread it – I have heard enough!

LADY MILFORD. This alliance with the major – you, like the rest of the world, believe to be the result of a court intrigue – Sophy, blush not – be not ashamed of me – it is the work of – my love!

SOPHY. Heavens! As I suspected!

LADY MILFORD. Yes, Sophy, they are all deceived. The weak prince – the diplomatic baron – the silly marshal – each and all of these are firmly convinced that this marriage is a most infallible means of preserving me to the prince, and of uniting us still more firmly! But this will prove the very means of separating us forever, and bursting asunder these execrable bonds. The cheater cheated – outwitted by a weak woman. Ye yourselves are leading me to the man of my heart – this was all I sought. Let him but once be mine – be but mine – then, oh, then, a long farewell to all this despicable pomp!

SCENE II. – An old valet of the DUKE'S, with a casket of jewels. The former

VALET. His serene highness begs your ladyship's acceptance of these jewels as a nuptial present. They have just arrived from Venice.

LADY MILFORD (opens the casket and starts back in astonishment). What did these jewels cost the duke?

VALET. Nothing!

LADY MILFORD. Nothing! Are you beside yourself? (retreating a step or two.) Old man! you fix on me a look as though you would pierce me through. Did you say these precious jewels cost nothing?

VALET. Yesterday seven thousand children of the land left their homes to go to America – they pay for all.

LADY MILFORD (sets the casket suddenly down, and paces up and down the room; after a pause, to the VALET). What distresses you, old man? you are weeping!

VALET (wiping his eyes, and trembling violently). Yes, for these jewels. My two sons are among the number.

LADY MILFORD. But they went not by compulsion?

VALET (laughing bitterly). Oh! dear no! they were all volunteers! There were certainly some few forward lads who pushed to the front of the ranks and inquired of the colonel at what price the prince sold his subjects per yoke, upon which our gracious ruler ordered the regiments to be marched to the parade, and the malcontents to be shot. We heard the report of the muskets, and saw brains and blood spurting about us, while the whole band shouted – "Hurrah for America!"

LADY MILFORD. And I heard nothing of all this! saw nothing!

VALET. No, most gracious lady, because you rode off to the bear-hunt with his highness just at the moment the drum was beating for the march. 'Tis a pity your ladyship missed the pleasure of the sight – here, crying children might be seen following their wretched father – there, a mother distracted with grief was rushing forward to throw her tender infant among the bristling bayonets – here, a bride and bridegroom were separated with the sabre's stroke – and there, graybeards were seen to stand in despair, and fling their very crutches after their sons in the New World – and, in the midst of all this, the drums were beating loudly, that the prayers and lamentations might not reach the Almighty ear.

LADY MILFORD (rising in violent emotion). Away with these jewels – their rays pierce my bosom like the flames of hell. Moderate your grief, old man. Your children shall be restored to you. You shall again clasp them to your bosom.

VALET (with warmth). Yes, heaven knows! We shall meet again! As they passed the city gates they turned round and cried aloud: "God bless our wives and children – long life to our gracious sovereign. At the day of judgment we shall all meet again!"

LADY MILFORD (walks up and down the room in great agitation). Horrible! most horrible! – and they would persuade me that I had dried up all the tears in the land. Now, indeed, my eyes are fearfully opened! Go – tell the prince that I will thank him in person! (As the valet is going she drops the purse into his hat.) And take this as a recompense for the truth you have revealed to me.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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