

**GOTTHOLD
EPHRAIM
LESSING**

MINNA VON BARNHELM

Gotthold Lessing
Minna Von Barnhelm

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Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born at Kamenz, Germany, January 22, 1729, the son of a Lutheran minister. He was educated at Meissen and Leipzig, and began writing for the stage before he was twenty. In 1748 he went to Berlin, where he met Voltaire and for a time was powerfully influenced by him. The most important product of this period was his tragedy of "Miss Sara Samson," a modern version of the story of Medea, which began the vogue of the sentimental middle-class play in Germany. After a second sojourn in Leipzig (1755-1758), during which he wrote criticism, lyrics, and fables, Lessing returned to Berlin and began to publish his "Literary Letters," making himself by the vigor and candor of his criticism a real force in contemporary literature. From Berlin he went to Breslau, where he made the first sketches of two of his greatest works, "Laocoon" and "Minna von Barnhelm," both of which were issued after his return to the Prussian capital. Failing in his effort to be appointed Director of the Royal Library by Frederick the Great, Lessing went to Hamburg in 1767 as critic of a new national theatre, and in connection with this enterprise he issued twice a week the "Hamburgische Dramaturgie," the two volumes of which are a rich mine of dramatic criticism and theory.

His next residence was at Wolfenbittel, where he had charge of the ducal library from 1770 till his death in 1781. Here he wrote his tragedy of "Emilia Galotti," founded on the story of Virginia, and engaged for a time in violent religious controversies, one important outcome of which was his "Education of the Human Race." On being ordered by the Brunswick authorities to give up controversial writing, he found expression for his views in his play "Nathan the Wise," his last great production.

The importance of Lessing's masterpiece in comedy, "Minna von Barnhelm," is difficult to exaggerate. It was the beginning of German national drama; and by the patriotic interest of its historical background, by its sympathetic treatment of the German soldier and the German woman, and by its happy blending of the amusing and the pathetic, it won a place in the national heart from which no succeeding comedy has been able to dislodge it.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MAJOR VON TELLHEIM, a discharged officer.

MINNA VON BARNHELM.

COUNT VON BRUCHSAL, her uncle.

FRANZISKA, her lady's maid.

JUST, servant to the Major.

PAUL WERNER, an old Sergeant of the Major's.

The LANDLORD of an Inn.

A LADY.

An ORDERLY.

RICCAUT DE LA MARLINIERE.

The scene alternates between the Parlour of an Inn, and a Room adjoining it.

ACT I

SCENE I

Just

JUST (sitting in a corner, and talking while asleep).

Rogue of a landlord! You treat us so? On, comrade! hit hard!

(He strikes with his fist, and wakes through the exertion).

Ha! there he is again! I cannot shut an eye without fighting with him.

I wish he got but half the blows. Why, it is morning! I must just look for my poor master at once; if I can help it, he shall not set foot in the cursed house again. I wonder where he has passed the night?

SCENE II

Landlord, Just

LAND.

Good-morning, Herr Just; good-morning! What, up so early! Or shall I say—up so late?

JUST.

Say which you please.

LAND.

I say only—good-morning! and that deserves, I suppose, that Herr Just should answer, "Many thanks."

JUST.

Many thanks.

LAND.

One is peevish, if one can't have one's proper rest. What will you bet the Major has not returned home, and you have been keeping watch for him?

JUST.

How the man can guess everything!

LAND.

I surmise, I surmise.

JUST. (turns round to go).

Your servant!

LAND. (stops him).

Not so, Herr Just!

JUST.

Very well, then, not your servant!

LAND.

What, Herr Just, I do hope you are not still angry about yesterday's affair! Who would keep his anger over night?

JUST.

I; and over a good many nights.

LAND.

Is that like a Christian?

JUST.

As much so as to turn an honourable man who cannot pay to a day, out of doors, into the street.

LAND.

Fie! who would be so wicked?

JUST.

A Christian innkeeper.—My master! such a man! such an officer!

LAND.

I thrust him from the house into the streets? I have far too much respect for an officer to do that, and far too much pity for a discharged one! I was obliged to have another room prepared for him.

Think no more about it, Herr Just.

(Calls)

—Hullo! I will make it good in another way.

(A lad comes.)

Bring a glass; Herr Just will have a drop; something good.

JUST.

Do not trouble yourself, Mr. Landlord. May the drop turn to poison, which... But I will not swear; I have not yet breakfasted.

LAND. (to the lad, who brings a bottle of spirits and a glass).

Give it here; go! Now, Herr Just; something quite excellent; strong, delicious, and wholesome. (Fills, and holds it out to him.)

That can set an over-taxed stomach to rights again!

JUST.

I hardly ought!—And yet why should I let my health suffer on account of his incivility?

(Takes it, and drinks.)

LAND.

May it do you good, Herr Just!

JUST. (giving the glass back).

Not bad! But, Landlord, you are nevertheless an ill-mannered brute!

LAND.

Not so, not so!... Come, another glass; one cannot stand upon one leg.

JUST. (after drinking).

I must say so much—it is good, very good! Made at home, Landlord?

LAND.

At home, indeed! True Dantzic, real double distilled!

JUST.

Look ye, Landlord; if I could play the hypocrite, I would do so for such stuff as that; but I cannot, so it must out.—You are an illmannered brute all the same.

LAND.

Nobody in my life ever told me that before... But another glass, Herr Just; three is the lucky number!

JUST.

With all my heart!—

(Drinks).

Good stuff indeed, capital! But truth is good also, and indeed, Landlord, you are an ill-mannered brute all the same!

LAND.

If I was, do you think I should let you say so?

JUST.

Oh! yes; a brute seldom has spirit.

LAND.

One more, Herr Just: a four-stranded rope is the strongest.

JUST.

No, enough is as good as a feast! And what good will it do you, Landlord? I shall stick to my text till the last drop in the bottle.

Shame, Landlord, to have such good Dantzic, and such bad manners! To turn out of his room, in his absence—a man like my master, who has lodged at your house above a year; from whom you have had already so many shining thalers; who never owed a heller in his life—because he let payment run for a couple of months, and because he does not spend quite so much as he used.

LAND.

But suppose I really wanted the room and saw beforehand that the Major would willingly have given it up if we could only have waited some time for his return! Should I let strange gentlefolk like them drive away again from my door! Should I wilfully send such a prize into the clutches of another innkeeper? Besides, I don't believe they could have got a lodging elsewhere. The inns are all now

quite full. Could such a young, beautiful, amiable lady remain in the street? Your master is much too gallant for that. And what does he lose by the change? Have not I given him another room?

JUST.

By the pigeon-house at the back, with a view between a neighbour's chimneys.

LAND.

The view was uncommonly fine, before the confounded neighbour obstructed it. The room is otherwise very nice, and is papered!!!!

JUST.

Has been!

LAND.

No, one side is so still. And the little room adjoining, what is the matter with that? It has a chimney which, perhaps, smokes somewhat in the winter!!!!

JUST.

But does very nicely in the summer. I believe, Landlord, you are mocking us into the bargain!

LAND.

Come, come; Herr Just, Herr Just!!!!

JUST.

Don't make Herr Just's head hot!!!!

LAND.

I make his head hot? It is the Dantzic does that.

JUST.

An officer, like my master! Or do you think that a discharged officer, is not an officer who may break your neck for you? Why were you all, you Landlords, so civil during the war? Why was every officer an honourable man then and every soldier a worthy, brave fellow? Does this bit of a peace make you so bumptious?

LAND.

What makes you fly out so, Herr Just!

JUST.

I will fly out.

SCENE III

Major von Tellheim, Landlord, Just

MAJ. T. (entering).

Just!

JUST. (supposing the Landlord is still speaking).

Just? Are we so intimate?

MAJ. T.

Just!

JUST.

I thought I was "Herr Just" with you.

LAND. (seeing the Major).

Hist! hist! Herr Just, Herr Just, look round; your master!!!!

MAJ. T.

Just, I think you are quarreling! What did I tell you?

LAND.

Quarrel, your honour? God forbid! Would your most humble servant dare to quarrel with one who has the honour of being in your service?

JUST.

If I could but give him a good whack on that cringing cat's back of his!

LAND.

It is true Herr Just speaks up for his master, and rather warmly; but in that he is right. I esteem him so much the more: I like him for it.

JUST.

I should like to knock his teeth out for him!

LAND.

It is only a pity that he puts himself in a passion for nothing. For I feel quite sure that your honour is not displeased with me in this matter, since—necessity—made it necessary!!!!

MAJ. T.

More than enough, sir! I am in your debt; you turn out my room in my absence. You must be paid, I must seek a lodging elsewhere. Very natural.

LAND.

Elsewhere? You are going to quit, honoured sir? Oh, unfortunate stricken man that I am. No, never! Sooner shall the lady give up the apartments again. The Major cannot and will not let her have his room.

It is his; she must go; I cannot help it. I will go, honoured sir!!!!

MAJ. T.

My friend, do not make two foolish strokes instead of one. The lady must retain possession of the room!!!!

LAND.

And your honour could suppose that from distrust, from fear of not being paid, I... As if I did not know that your honour could pay me as soon as you pleased. The sealed purse... five hundred thalers in louis d'ors marked on it—which your honour had in your writing-desk ... is in good keeping.

MAJ. T.

I trust so; as the rest of my property. Just shall take them into his keeping, when he has paid your bill!!!!

LAND.

Really, I was quite alarmed when I found the purse. I always considered your honour a methodical and prudent man, who never got quite out of money... but still, had I supposed there was ready money in the desk!!!!

MAJ. T.

You would have treated me rather more civilly. I understand you. Go, sir; leave me. I wish to speak with my servant.

LAND.

But, honoured sir!!!!

MAJ. T.

Come, Just; he does not wish to permit me to give my orders to you in his house.

LAND.

I am going, honoured sir! My whole house is at your service.

(Exit.)

SCENE IV

Major Von Tellheim, Just

JUST. (stamping with his foot and spitting after the Landlord).

Ugh!

MAJ. T.

What is the matter?

JUST.

I am choking with rage.

MAJ. T.

That is as bad as from plethora.

JUST.

And for you sir, I hardly know you any longer. May I die before your eyes, if you do not encourage this malicious, unfeeling wretch. In spite of gallows, axe, and torture I could... yes, I could have throttled him with these hands, and torn him to pieces with these teeth!

MAJ. T.

You wild beast!

JUST.

Better a wild beast than such a man!

MAJ. T.

But what is it that you want?

JUST.

I want you to perceive how much he insults you.

MAJ. T.

And then!!!!

JUST.

To take your revenge... No, the fellow is beneath your notice!

MAJ. T.

But to commission you to avenge me? That was my intention from the first. He should not have seen me again, but have received the amount of his bill from your hands. I know that you can throw down a handful of money with a tolerably contemptuous mien.

JUST.

Oh! a pretty sort of revenge!

MAJ. T.

Which, however, we must defer. I have not one heller of ready money, and I know not where to raise any.

JUST.

No money! What is that purse then with five hundred thalers' worth of louis d'ors, which the Landlord found in your desk?

MAJ. T.

That is money given into my charge.

JUST.

Not the hundred pistoles which your old sergeant brought you four or five weeks back?

MAJ. T.

The same. Paul Werner's; right.

JUST.

And you have not used them yet? Yet, sir, you may do what you please with them. I will answer for it that!!!!

MAJ. T.

Indeed!

JUST.

Werner heard from me, how they had treated your claims upon the War Office. He heard!!!!

MAJ. T.

That I should certainly be a beggar soon, if I was not one already. I am much obliged to you, Just. And the news induced Werner to offer to share his little all with me. I am very glad that I guessed this.

Listen, Just; let me have your account, directly, too; we must part.

JUST.

How! what!

MAJ. T.

Not a word. There is someone coming.

SCENE V

Lady *in mourning*, Major von Tellheim, Just

LADY.

I ask your pardon, sir.

MAJ. T.

Whom do you seek, Madam?

LADY.

The worthy gentleman with whom I have the honour of speaking. You do not know me again. I am the widow of your late captain.

MAJ. T.

Good heavens, Madam, how you are changed!

LADY.

I have just risen from a sick bed, to which grief on the loss of my husband brought me. I am troubling you at a very early hour, Major von Tellheim, but I am going into the country, where a kind, but also unfortunate friend, has for the present offered me an asylum.

MAJ. T. (to Just).

Leave us.

SCENE VI

Lady, Major von Tellheim

MAJ. T.

Speak freely, Madam! You must not be ashamed of your bad fortune before me. Can I serve you in any way?

LADY.

Major!!!!

MAJ. T.

I pity you, Madam! How can I serve you? You know your husband was my friend; my friend, I say, and I have always been sparing of this title.

LADY.

Who knows better than I do how worthy you were of his friendship how worthy he was of yours? You would have been in his last thoughts, your name would have been the last sound on his dying lips, had not natural affection, stronger than friendship, demanded this sad prerogative for his unfortunate son, and his unhappy wife.

MAJ. T.

Cease, Madam! I could willingly weep with you; but I have no tears to-day. Spare me! You come to me at a time when I might easily be misled to murmur against Providence. Oh! honest Marloff! Quick, Madam, what have you to request? If it is in my power to assist you, if it is in my power!!!!

LADY.

I cannot depart without fulfilling his last wishes. He recollected, shortly before his death, that he was dying a debtor to you, and he conjured me to discharge his debt with the first ready money I should have. I have sold his carriage, and come to redeem his note.

MAJ. T.

What, Madam! Is that your object in coming?

LADY.

It is. Permit me to count out the money to you.

MAJ. T.

No, Madam. Marloff a debtor to me! that can hardly be. Let us look, however.

(Takes out a pocketbook, and searches.)

I find nothing of the kind.

LADY.

You have doubtless mislaid his note; besides, it is nothing to the purpose. Permit me!!!!

MAJ. T.

No, Madam; I am careful not to mislay such documents. If I have not got it, it is a proof that I never had it, or that it has been honoured and already returned by me.

LADY.

Major!

MAJ. T.

Without doubt, Madam; Marloff does not owe me anything—nor can I remember that he ever did owe me anything. This is so, Madam. He has much rather left me in his debt. I have never been able to do anything to repay a man who shared with me good and ill luck, honour and danger, for six years. I shall not forget that he has left a son. He shall be my son, as soon as I can be a father to him. The embarrassment in which I am at present!!!!

LADY.

Generous man! But do not think so meanly of me. Take the money, Major, and then at least I shall be at ease.

MAJ. T.

What more do you require to tranquillize you, than my assurance that the money does not belong to me? Or do you wish that I should rob the young orphan of my friend? Rob, Madam; for that it would be in the true meaning of the word. The money belongs to him; invest it for him.

LADY.

I understand you; pardon me if I do not yet rightly know how to accept a kindness. Where have you learnt that a mother will do more for her child than for the preservation of her own life? I am going!!!!

MAJ. T.

Go, Madam, and may you have a prosperous journey! I do not ask you to let me hear from you. Your news might come to me when it might be of little use to me. There is yet one thing, Madam; I had nearly forgotten that which is of most consequence. Marloff also had claims upon the chest of our old regiment. His claims are as good as mine. If my demands are paid, his must be paid also. I will be answerable for them.

LADY.

Oh! Sir... but what can I say? Thus to purpose future good deeds is, in the eyes of heaven, to have performed them already. May you receive its reward, as well as my tears.

(Exit.)

SCENE VII

Major von Tellheim

MAJ. T.

Poor, good woman! I must not forget to destroy the bill.

(Takes some papers from his pocketbook and destroys them.)

Who would guarantee that my own wants might not some day tempt me to make use of it?

SCENE VIII

Just, Major von Tellheim

MAJ. T.

Is that you, Just?

JUST. (wiping his eyes).

Yes.

MAJ. T.

You have been crying?

JUST.

I have been writing out my account in the kitchen, and the place is full of smoke. Here it is, sir.

MAJ. T.

Give it to me.

JUST.

Be merciful with me, sir. I know well that they have not been so with you; still!!!!

MAJ. T.

What do you want?

JUST.

I should sooner have expected my death, than my discharge.

MAJ. T.

I cannot keep you any longer: I must learn to manage without servants.

(Opens the paper, and reads.)

"What my master, the Major, owes me:—Three months and a half wages, six thalers per month, is 21 thalers. During the first part of this month, laid out in sundries—1 thaler 7 groschen 9 pfennigs. Total, 22 thalers 7gr. 9pf." Right; and it is just that I also pay your wages, for the whole of the current month.

JUST.

Turn over, sir.

MAJ. T.

Oh! more?

(Reads.)

"What I owe my master, the Major:—Paid for me to the army-surgeon twenty-five thalers. Attendance and nurse during my cure, paid for me, thirty-nine thalers. Advanced, at my request, to my father—who was burnt out of his house and robbed—without reckoning the two horses of which he made him a present, fifty thalers. Total 114 thalers. Deduct the above 22 thalers, 7gr. 9pf.; I remain in debt to my master, the Major, 91 thalers, 16gr. 3pf." You are mad, my good fellow!

JUST.

I willingly grant that I owe you much more; but it would be wasting ink to write it down. I cannot pay you that: and if you take my livery from me too, which, by the way, I have not yet earned,—I would rather you had let me die in the workhouse.

MAJ. T.

For what do you take me? You owe me nothing; and I will recommend you to one of my friends, with whom you will fare better than with me.

JUST.

I do not owe you anything, and yet you turn me away!

MAJ. T.

Because I do not wish to owe you anything.

JUST.

On that account? Only on that account? As certain as I am in your debt, as certain as you can never be in mine, so certainly shall you not turn me away now. Do what you will, Major, I remain in your service; I must remain.

MAJ. T.

With your obstinacy, your insolence, your savage boisterous temper towards all who you think have no business to speak to you, your malicious pranks, your love of revenge,!!!!

JUST.

Make me as bad as you will, I shall not think worse of myself than of my dog. Last winter I was walking one evening at dusk along the river, when I heard something whine. I stooped down, and reached in the direction whence the sound came, and when I thought I was saving a child, I pulled a dog out of the water. That is well, thought I. The dog followed me; but I am not fond of dogs, so I drove him away—in vain. I whipped him away—in vain. I shut him out of my room at night;

he lay down before the door. If he came too near me, I kicked him; he yelped, looked up at me, and wagged his tail. I have never yet given him a bit of bread with my own hand; and yet I am the only person whom he will obey, or who dare touch him. He jumps about me, and shows off his tricks to me, without my asking for them. He is an ugly dog, but he is a good animal. If he carries it on much longer, I shall at last give over hating him.

MAJ. T. (aside).

As I do him. No, there is no one perfectly inhuman. Just, we will not part.

JUST.

Certainly not! And you wanted to manage without servants! You forget your wounds, and that you only have the use of one arm. Why, you are not able to dress alone. I am indispensable to you; and I am—without boasting, Major,—I am a servant who, if the worst comes to the worst, can beg and steal for his master.

MAJ. T.

Just, we will part.

JUST.

All right, Sir!

SCENE IX

Servant, Major von Tellheim, Just

SER.

I say, comrade!

JUST.

What is the matter?

SER.

Can you direct me to the officer who lodged yesterday in that room?

(Pointing to the one out of which he is coming).

JUST.

That I could easily do. What have you got for him?

SER.

What we always have, when we have nothing—compliments. My mistress hears that he has been turned out on her account. My mistress knows good manners, and I am therefore to beg his pardon.

JUST.

Well then, beg his pardon; there he stands.

SER.

What is he? What is his name?

MAJ. T.

I have already heard your message, my friend. It is unnecessary politeness on the part of your mistress, which I beg to acknowledge duly. Present my compliments to her. What is the name of your mistress?

SER.

Her name! We call her my Lady.

MAJ. T.

The name of her family?

SER.

I have not heard that yet, and it is not my business to ask. I manage so that I generally get a new master every six weeks. Hang all their names!

JUST.

Bravo, comrade!

SER.

I was engaged by my present mistress a few days ago, in Dresden. I believe she has come here to look for her lover.

MAJ. T.

Enough, friend. I wished to know the name of your mistress, not her secrets. Go!

SER.

Comrade, he would not do for my master.

SCENE X

Major von Tellheim, Just

MAJ. T.

Just! see that we get out of this house directly! The politeness of this strange lady affects me more than the churlishness of the host.

Here, take this ring—the only thing of value which I have left—of which I never thought such a use. Pawn it! get eighty louis d'ors for it: our host's bill can scarcely amount to thirty. Pay him, and remove my things.... Ah, where? Where you will. The cheaper the inn, the better. You will find me in the neighbouring coffee-house. I am going;

you will see to it all properly?

JUST.

Have no fear, Major!

MAJ. T. (comes back).

Above all things, do not let my pistols be forgotten, which hang beside the bed.

JUST.

I will forget nothing.

MAJ. T. (comes back again).

Another thing: bring your dog with you too. Do you hear, Just?

SCENE XI

Just

JUST.

The dog will not stay behind, he will take care of that. Hem! My master still had this valuable ring and carried it in his pocket instead of on his finger! My good landlord, we are not yet so poor as we look. To him himself, I will pawn you, you beautiful little ring! I know he will be annoyed that you will not all be consumed in his house. Ah!

SCENE XII

Paul Werner, Just

JUST.

Hullo, Werner! good-day to you, Werner. Welcome to the town.

WER.

The accursed village! I can't manage to get at home in it again.

Merry, my boys, merry; I have got some more money! Where is the Major?

JUST.

He must have met you; he just went down stairs.

WER.

I came up the back stairs. How is he? I should have been with you last week, but!!!!

JUST.

Well, what prevented you?

WER.

Just, did you ever hear of Prince Heraclius?

JUST.

Heraclius? Not that I know of.

WER.

Don't you know the great hero of the East?

JUST.

I know the wise men of the East well enough, who go about with the stars on New Year's Eve.

WER.

Brother, I believe you read the newspapers as little as the Bible. You do not know Prince Heraclius. Not know the brave man who seized Persia, and will break into the Ottoman Porte in a few days? Thank God, there is still war somewhere in the world! I have long enough hoped it would break out here again. But there they sit and take care of their skins. No, a soldier I was, and a soldier I must be again! In short, (looking round carefully, to see if anyone is listening) between ourselves, Just, I am going to Persia, to have a few campaigns against the Turks, under his Royal Highness Prince Heraclius.

JUST.

You?

WER.

I myself. Our ancestors fought bravely against the Turks; and so ought we too, if we would be honest men and good Christians. I allow that a campaign against the Turks cannot be half so pleasant as one against the French; but then it must be so much the more beneficial in this world and the next. The swords of the Turks are all set with diamonds.

JUST.

I would not walk a mile to have my head split with one of their sabres. You will not be so mad as to leave your comfortable little farm!

WER.

Oh! I take that with me. Do you see? The property is sold.

JUST.

Sold?

WER.

Hist! Here are a hundred ducats, which I received yesterday towards the payment: I am bringing them for the Major.

JUST.

What is he to do with them?

WER.

What is he to do with them? Spend them; play them, or drink them away, or whatever he pleases. He must have money, and it is bad enough that they have made his own so troublesome to him. But I know what I would do, were I in his place. I would say—"The deuce take you all here; I will go with Paul Werner to Persia!" Hang it! Prince Heraclius must have heard of Major von Tellheim, if he has not heard of Paul Werner, his late sergeant. Our affair at Katzenhauser!!!!

JUST.

Shall I give you an account of that?

WER.

You give me! I know well that a fine battle array is beyond your comprehension. I am not going to throw my pearls before swine. Here, take the hundred ducats; give them to the Major: tell him, he may keep these for me too. I am going to the market now. I have sent in a couple of loads of rye; what I get for them he can also have.

JUST.

Werner, you mean it well; but we don't want your money. Keep your ducats; and your hundred pistoles you can also have back safe, as soon as you please.

WER.

What, has the Major money still?

JUST.

No.

WER.

Has he borrowed any?

JUST.

No.

WER.

On what does he live, then?

JUST.

We have everything put down in the bill; and when they won't put anything more down, and turn us out of the house, we pledge anything we may happen to have, and go somewhere else. I say, Paul, we must play this landlord here a trick.

WER.

If he has annoyed the Major, I am ready.

JUST.

What if we watch for him in the evening, when he comes from his club, and give him a good thrashing?

WER.

In the dark! Watch for him! Two to one! No, that won't do.

JUST.

Or if we burn his house over his head?

WER.

Fire and burn! Why, Just, one hears that you have been baggage-boy and not soldier. Shame!

JUST.

Or if we ruin his daughter? But she is cursedly ugly.

WER.

She has probably been ruined long ago. At any rate you don't want any help there. But what is the matter with you? What has happened?

JUST.

Just come with me, and you shall hear something to make you stare.

WER.

The devil must be loose here, then?

JUST.

Just so; come along.

WER.

So much the better! To Persia, then; to Persia.

ACT II

SCENE I

Minna's Room. Minna, Franziska

MIN. (in morning dress, looking at her watch).

Franziska, we have risen very early. The time will hang heavy on our hands.

FRAN.

Who can sleep in these abominable large towns? The carriages, the watchmen, the drums, the cats, the soldiers, never cease to rattle, to call, to roll, to mew, and to swear; just as if the last thing the night is intended for was for sleep. Have a cup of tea, my lady!

MIN.

I don't care for tea.

FRAN.

I will have some chocolate made.

MIN.

For yourself, if you like.

FRAN.

For myself! I would as soon talk to myself as drink by myself. Then the time will indeed hang heavy. For very weariness we shall have to make our toilets, and try on the dress in which we intend to make the first attack!

MIN.

Why do you talk of attacks, when I have only come to require that the capitulation be ratified?

FRAN.

But the officer whom we have dislodged, and to whom we have apologized, cannot be the best bred man in the world, or he might at least have begged the honour of being allowed to wait upon you.

MIN.

All officers are not Tellheims. To tell you the truth, I only sent him the message in order to have an opportunity of inquiring from him about Tellheim. Franziska, my heart tells me my journey will be a successful one and that I shall find him.

FRAN.

The heart, my lady! One must not trust to that too much. The heart echoes to us the words of our tongues. If the tongue was as much inclined to speak the thoughts of the heart, the fashion of keeping mouths under lock and key would have come in long ago.

MIN.

Ha! ha! mouths under lock and key. That fashion would just suit me.

FRAN.

Rather not show the most beautiful set of teeth, than let the heart be seen through them every moment.

MIN.

What, are you so reserved?

FRAN.

No, my lady; but I would willingly be more so. People seldom talk of the virtue they possess, and all the more often of that which they do not possess.

MIN.

Franziska, you made a very just remark there.

FRAN.

Made! Does one make it, if it occurs to one?

MIN.

And do you know why I consider it so good? It applies to my Tellheim.

FRAN.

What would not, in your opinion, apply to him?

MIN.

Friend and foe say he is the bravest man in the world. But who ever heard him talk of bravery? He has the most upright mind; but uprightness and nobleness of mind are words never on his tongue.

FRAN.

Of what virtues does he talk then?

MIN.

He talks of none, for he is wanting in none.

FRAN.

That is just what I wished to hear.

MIN.

Wait, Franziska; I am wrong. He often talks of economy. Between ourselves, I believe he is extravagant.

FRAN.

One thing more, my lady. I have often heard him mention truth and constancy toward you. What, if he be inconstant?

MIN.

Miserable girl! But do you mean that seriously?

FRAN.

How long is it since he wrote to you?

MIN.

Alas! he has only written to me once since the peace.

FRAN.

What!—A sigh on account of the peace? Surprising? Peace ought only to make good the ill which war causes; but it seems to disturb the good which the latter, its opposite, may have occasioned. Peace should not be so capricious!... How long have we had peace? The time seems wonderfully long, when there is so little news. It is no use the post going regularly again; nobody writes, for nobody has anything to write about.

MIN.

"Peace has been made," he wrote to me, "and I am approaching the fulfillment of my wishes." But since he only wrote that to me once, only once!!!!

FRAN.

And since he compels us to run after this fulfillment of his wishes ourselves... If we can but find him, he shall pay for this! Suppose, in the meantime, he may have accomplished his wishes, and we should learn here that!!!!

MIN. (anxiously).

That he is dead?

FRAN.

To you, my lady; and married to another.

MIN.

You tease, you! Wait, Franziska, I will pay you out for this! But talk to me, or I shall fall asleep. His regiment was disbanded after the peace. Who knows into what a confusion of bills and papers he may thereby have been brought? Who knows into what other regiment, or to what distant station, he may have been sent? Who knows what circumstances—There's a knock at the door.

FRAN.
Come in!

SCENE II

Landlord, Minna, Franziska

LAND. (putting his head in at the door).

Am I permitted, your ladyship?

FRAN.

Our landlord?—Come in!

LAND. (A pen behind his ear, a sheet of paper and an inkstand in his hand).

I am come, your ladyship, to wish you a most humble good-morning;
(to Franziska) and the same to you, my pretty maid.

FRAN.

A polite man!

MIN.

We are obliged to you.

FRAN.

And wish you also a good-morning.

LAND.

May I venture to ask how your ladyship has passed the first night under my poor roof?

FRAN.

The roof is not so bad, sir; but the beds might have been better.

LAND.

What do I hear! Not slept well! Perhaps the over-fatigue of the journey!!!!

MIN.

Perhaps.

LAND.

Certainly, certainly, for otherwise.... Yet, should there be anything not perfectly comfortable, my lady, I hope you will not fail to command me.

FRAN.

Very well, Mr. Landlord, very well! We are not bashful; and least of all should one be bashful at an inn. We shall not fail to say what we may wish.

LAND.

I next come to...

(taking the pen from behind his ear).

FRAN.

Well?

LAND.

Without doubt, my lady, you are already acquainted with the wise regulations of our police.

MIN.

Not in the least, sir.

LAND.

We landlords are instructed not to take in any stranger, of whatever rank or sex he may be, for four-and-twenty hours, without delivering, in writing, his name, place of abode, occupation, object of his journey, probable stay, and so on, to the proper authorities.

MIN.

Very well.

LAND.

Will your ladyship then be so good...

(going to the table, and making ready to write).

MIN.

Willingly. My name is!!!!

LAND.

One minute!

(He writes.)

"Date, 22nd August, A. D., &C.; arrived at the King of Spain hotel."

Now your name, my lady.

MIN.

Fraulein von Barnhelm.

LAND. (writes).

"Von Barnhelm." Coming from.... where, your ladyship?

MIN.

From my estate in Saxony.

LAND. (writes).

"Estate in Saxony." Saxony! Indeed, indeed! In Saxony, your ladyship?

Saxony?

FRAN.

Well, why not? I hope it is no sin in this country to come from Saxony!

LAND.

A sin? Heaven forbid! That would be quite a new sin! From Saxony then?

Yes, yes, from Saxony, a delightful country, Saxony! But if I am right, your ladyship, Saxony is not small, and has several—how shall I call them? districts, provinces. Our police are very particular, your ladyship.

MIN.

I understand. From my estate in Thuringia, then.

LAND.

From Thuringia! Yes, that is better, your ladyship; that is more exact.

(Writes and reads.)

"Fraulein von Barnhelm, coming from her estate in Thuringia, together with her lady in waiting and two men servants."

FRAN.

Lady in waiting! That means me, I suppose!

LAND.

Yes, my pretty maid.

FRAN.

Well, Mr. Landlord, instead of "lady in waiting," write "maid in waiting." You say, the police are very exact; it might cause a misunderstanding, which might give me trouble some day when my banns are read out. For I really am still unmarried, and my name is Franziska, with the family name of Willig: Franziska Willig. I also come from Thuringia. My father was a miller, on one of my lady's estates. It is called Little Rammsdorf. My brother has the mill now. I was taken very early to the manor, and educated with my lady. We are of the same age—one-and-twenty next Candlemas. I learnt everything my lady learnt. I should like the police to have a full account of me.

LAND.

Quite right, my pretty maid; I will bear that in mind, in case of future inquiries. But now, your ladyship, your business here?

MIN.

My business here?

LAND.

Have you any business with His Majesty the King?

MIN.

Oh! no.

LAND.

Or at our courts of justice?

MIN.

No.

LAND.

Or!!!!

MIN.

No, no. I have come here solely on account of my own private affairs.

LAND.

Quite right, your ladyship; but what are those private affairs?

MIN.

They are... Franziska, I think we are undergoing an examination.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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