

## ACT II

### SCENE

A state room in the Ducal Palace, hung with tapestries representing the Masque of Venus; a large door in the centre opens into a corridor of red marble, through which one can see a view of Padua; a large canopy is set (R.C.) with three thrones, one a little lower than the others; the ceiling is made of long gilded beams; furniture of the period, chairs covered with gilt leather, and buffets set with gold and silver plate, and chests painted with mythological scenes. A number of the courtiers is out on the corridor looking from it down into the street below; from the street comes the roar of a mob and cries of 'Death to the Duke': after a little interval enter the Duke very calmly; he is leaning on the arm of Guido Ferranti; with him enters also the Lord Cardinal; the mob still shouting.

### DUKE

No, my Lord Cardinal, I weary of her!

Why, she is worse than ugly, she is good.

### MAFFIO

[excitedly]

Your Grace, there are two thousand people there  
Who every moment grow more clamorous.

DUKE

Tut, man, they waste their strength upon their lungs!  
People who shout so loud, my lords, do nothing;  
The only men I fear are silent men.

[A yell from the people.]

You see, Lord Cardinal, how my people love me.

[Another yell.] Go, Petrucci,

And tell the captain of the guard below

To clear the square. Do you not hear me, sir?

Do what I bid you.

[Exit PETRUCCI.]

CARDINAL

I beseech your Grace

To listen to their grievances.

DUKE

[sitting on his throne]

Ay! the peaches

Are not so big this year as they were last.

I crave your pardon, my lord Cardinal,

I thought you spake of peaches.

[A cheer from the people.]

What is that?

GUIDO

[rushes to the window]

The Duchess has gone forth into the square,

And stands between the people and the guard,

And will not let them shoot.

DUKE

The devil take her!

GUIDO

[still at the window]

And followed by a dozen of the citizens

Has come into the Palace.

DUKE

[starting up]

By Saint James,

Our Duchess waxes bold!

BARDI

Here comes the Duchess.

DUKE

Shut that door there; this morning air is cold.

[They close the door on the corridor.]

[Enter the Duchess followed by a crowd of meanly dressed Citizens.]

DUCHESS

[flinging herself upon her knees]

I do beseech your Grace to give us audience.

DUKE

What are these grievances?

DUCHESS

Alas, my Lord,

Such common things as neither you nor I,

Nor any of these noble gentlemen,

Have ever need at all to think about;

They say the bread, the very bread they eat,  
Is made of sorry chaff.

FIRST CITIZEN

Ay! so it is,  
Nothing but chaff.

DUKE

And very good food too,  
I give it to my horses.

DUCHESS

[restraining herself]  
They say the water,  
Set in the public cisterns for their use,  
[Has, through the breaking of the aqueduct,]  
To stagnant pools and muddy puddles turned.

DUKE

They should drink wine; water is quite unwholesome.

SECOND CITIZEN

Alack, your Grace, the taxes which the customs  
Take at the city gate are grown so high  
We cannot buy wine.

DUKE

Then you should bless the taxes  
Which make you temperate.

DUCHESS

Think, while we sit  
In gorgeous pomp and state, gaunt poverty  
Creeps through their sunless lanes, and with sharp knives  
Cuts the warm throats of children stealthily  
And no word said.

THIRD CITIZEN

Ay! marry, that is true,  
My little son died yesternight from hunger;  
He was but six years old; I am so poor,  
I cannot bury him.

DUKE

If you are poor,

Are you not blessed in that? Why, poverty

Is one of the Christian virtues,

[Turns to the CARDINAL.]

Is it not?

I know, Lord Cardinal, you have great revenues,

Rich abbey-lands, and tithes, and large estates

For preaching voluntary poverty.

DUCHESS

Nay but, my lord the Duke, be generous;

While we sit here within a noble house

[With shaded porticoes against the sun,

And walls and roofs to keep the winter out],

There are many citizens of Padua

Who in vile tenements live so full of holes,

That the chill rain, the snow, and the rude blast,

Are tenants also with them; others sleep

Under the arches of the public bridges

All through the autumn nights, till the wet mist

Stiffens their limbs, and fevers come, and so -

DUKE

And so they go to Abraham's bosom, Madam.

They should thank me for sending them to Heaven,

If they are wretched here.

[To the CARDINAL.]

Is it not said

Somewhere in Holy Writ, that every man

Should be contented with that state of life

God calls him to? Why should I change their state,

Or meddle with an all-wise providence,

Which has apportioned that some men should starve,

And others surfeit? I did not make the world.

FIRST CITIZEN

He hath a hard heart.

SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, be silent, neighbour;

I think the Cardinal will speak for us.

CARDINAL

True, it is Christian to bear misery,

Yet it is Christian also to be kind,

And there seem many evils in this town,

Which in your wisdom might your Grace reform.

FIRST CITIZEN



What is that word reform? What does it mean?

SECOND CITIZEN

Marry, it means leaving things as they are; I like it not.

DUKE

Reform Lord Cardinal, did YOU say reform?  
There is a man in Germany called Luther,  
Who would reform the Holy Catholic Church.  
Have you not made him heretic, and uttered  
Anathema, maranatha, against him?

CARDINAL

[rising from his seat]

He would have led the sheep out of the fold,  
We do but ask of you to feed the sheep.

DUKE

When I have shorn their fleeces I may feed them.  
As for these rebels -  
[DUCHESS entreats him.]

FIRST CITIZEN

That is a kind word,  
He means to give us something.

SECOND CITIZEN

Is that so?

DUKE

These ragged knaves who come before us here,  
With mouths chock-full of treason.

THIRD CITIZEN

Good my Lord,  
Fill up our mouths with bread; we'll hold our tongues.

DUKE

Ye shall hold your tongues, whether you starve or not.  
My lords, this age is so familiar grown,  
That the low peasant hardly doffs his hat,  
Unless you beat him; and the raw mechanic  
Elbows the noble in the public streets.

[To the Citizens.]

Still as our gentle Duchess has so prayed us,

And to refuse so beautiful a beggar  
Were to lack both courtesy and love,  
Touching your grievances, I promise this -

FIRST CITIZEN

Marry, he will lighten the taxes!

SECOND CITIZEN

Or a dole of bread, think you, for each man?

DUKE

That, on next Sunday, the Lord Cardinal  
Shall, after Holy Mass, preach you a sermon  
Upon the Beauty of Obedience.  
[Citizens murmur.]

FIRST CITIZEN

I' faith, that will not fill our stomachs!

SECOND CITIZEN

A sermon is but a sorry sauce, when  
You have nothing to eat with it.

DUCHESS

Poor people,  
You see I have no power with the Duke,  
But if you go into the court without,  
My almoner shall from my private purse,  
Divide a hundred ducats 'mongst you all.

FIRST CITIZEN

God save the Duchess, say I.

SECOND CITIZEN

God save her.

DUCHESS

And every Monday morn shall bread be set  
For those who lack it.  
[Citizens applaud and go out.]

FIRST CITIZEN

[going out]

Why, God save the Duchess again!

DUKE

[calling him back]

Come hither, fellow! what is your name?

FIRST CITIZEN

Dominick, sir.

DUKE

A good name! Why were you called Dominick?

FIRST CITIZEN

[scratching his head]

Marry, because I was born on St. George's day.

DUKE

A good reason! here is a ducat for you!

Will you not cry for me God save the Duke?

FIRST CITIZEN

[feebly]

God save the Duke.

DUKE

Nay! louder, fellow, louder.

FIRST CITIZEN

[a little louder]

God save the Duke!

DUKE

More lustily, fellow, put more heart in it!

Here is another ducat for you.

FIRST CITIZEN

[enthusiastically]

God save the Duke!

DUKE

[mockingly]

Why, gentlemen, this simple fellow's love

Touches me much. [To the Citizen, harshly.]

Go! [Exit Citizen, bowing.]

This is the way, my lords,  
You can buy popularity nowadays.  
Oh, we are nothing if not democratic!

[To the DUCHESS.]

Well, Madam,  
You spread rebellion 'midst our citizens.

DUCHESS

My Lord, the poor have rights you cannot touch,  
The right to pity, and the right to mercy.

DUKE

So, so, you argue with me? This is she,  
The gentle Duchess for whose hand I yielded  
Three of the fairest towns in Italy,  
Pisa, and Genoa, and Orvieto.

DUCHESS

Promised, my Lord, not yielded: in that matter  
Break you your word as ever.

DUKE

You wrong us, Madam,

There were state reasons.

DUCHESS

What state reasons are there  
For breaking holy promises to a state?

DUKE

There are wild boars at Pisa in a forest  
Close to the city: when I promised Pisa  
Unto your noble and most trusting father,  
I had forgotten there was hunting there.  
At Genoa they say,  
Indeed I doubt them not, that the red mullet  
Runs larger in the harbour of that town  
Than anywhere in Italy.  
[Turning to one of the Court.]  
You, my lord,  
Whose gluttonous appetite is your only god,  
Could satisfy our Duchess on that point.

DUCHESS

And Orvieto?

DUKE



[yawning]

I cannot now recall

Why I did not surrender Orvieto

According to the word of my contract.

Maybe it was because I did not choose.

[Goes over to the DUCHESS.]

Why look you, Madam, you are here alone;

'Tis many a dusty league to your grey France,

And even there your father barely keeps

A hundred ragged squires for his Court.

What hope have you, I say? Which of these lords

And noble gentlemen of Padua

Stands by your side.

DUCHESS

There is not one.

[GUIDO starts, but restrains himself.]

DUKE

Nor shall be,

While I am Duke in Padua: listen, Madam,

Being mine own, you shall do as I will,

And if it be my will you keep the house,

Why then, this palace shall your prison be;  
And if it be my will you walk abroad,  
Why, you shall take the air from morn to night.

DUCHESS

Sir, by what right -?

DUKE

Madam, my second Duchess  
Asked the same question once: her monument  
Lies in the chapel of Bartholomew,  
Wrought in red marble; very beautiful.  
Guido, your arm. Come, gentlemen, let us go  
And spur our falcons for the mid-day chase.  
Bethink you, Madam, you are here alone.  
[Exit the DUKE leaning on GUIDO, with his Court.]

DUCHESS

[looking after them]  
The Duke said rightly that I was alone;  
Deserted, and dishonoured, and defamed,  
Stood ever woman so alone indeed?  
Men when they woo us call us pretty children,  
Tell us we have not wit to make our lives,

And so they mar them for us. Did I say woo?  
We are their chattels, and their common slaves,  
Less dear than the poor hound that licks their hand,  
Less fondled than the hawk upon their wrist.  
Woo, did I say? bought rather, sold and bartered,  
Our very bodies being merchandise.

I know it is the general lot of women,  
Each miserably mated to some man  
Wrecks her own life upon his selfishness:  
That it is general makes it not less bitter.

I think I never heard a woman laugh,  
Laugh for pure merriment, except one woman,  
That was at night time, in the public streets.  
Poor soul, she walked with painted lips, and wore  
The mask of pleasure: I would not laugh like her;  
No, death were better.

[Enter GUIDO behind unobserved; the DUCHESS flings herself down  
before a picture of the Madonna.]

O Mary mother, with your sweet pale face  
Bending between the little angel heads  
That hover round you, have you no help for me?  
Mother of God, have you no help for me?

GUIDO

I can endure no longer.  
This is my love, and I will speak to her.

Lady, am I a stranger to your prayers?

DUCHESS

[rising]

None but the wretched needs my prayers, my lord.

GUIDO

Then must I need them, lady.

DUCHESS

How is that?

Does not the Duke show thee sufficient honour?

GUIDO

Your Grace, I lack no favours from the Duke,  
Whom my soul loathes as I loathe wickedness,  
But come to proffer on my bended knees,  
My loyal service to thee unto death.

DUCHESS

Alas! I am so fallen in estate

I can but give thee a poor meed of thanks.

GUIDO

[seizing her hand]

Hast thou no love to give me?

[The DUCHESS starts, and GUIDO falls at her feet.]

O dear saint,

If I have been too daring, pardon me!

Thy beauty sets my boyish blood aflame,

And, when my reverent lips touch thy white hand,

Each little nerve with such wild passion thrills

That there is nothing which I would not do

To gain thy love. [Leaps up.]

Bid me reach forth and pluck

Perilous honour from the lion's jaws,

And I will wrestle with the Nemean beast

On the bare desert! Fling to the cave of War

A gaud, a ribbon, a dead flower, something

That once has touched thee, and I'll bring it back

Though all the hosts of Christendom were there,

Inviolate again! ay, more than this,

Set me to scale the pallid white-faced cliffs

Of mighty England, and from that arrogant shield

Will I raze out the lilies of your France

Which England, that sea-lion of the sea,

Hath taken from her!

O dear Beatrice,

Drive me not from thy presence! without thee  
The heavy minutes crawl with feet of lead,  
But, while I look upon thy loveliness,  
The hours fly like winged Mercuries  
And leave existence golden.

DUCHESS

I did not think  
I should be ever loved: do you indeed  
Love me so much as now you say you do?

GUIDO

Ask of the sea-bird if it loves the sea,  
Ask of the roses if they love the rain,  
Ask of the little lark, that will not sing  
Till day break, if it loves to see the day:-  
And yet, these are but empty images,  
Mere shadows of my love, which is a fire  
So great that all the waters of the main  
Can not avail to quench it. Will you not speak?

DUCHESS

I hardly know what I should say to you.

GUIDO

Will you not say you love me?

DUCHESS

Is that my lesson?

Must I say all at once? 'Twere a good lesson

If I did love you, sir; but, if I do not,

What shall I say then?

GUIDO

If you do not love me,

Say, none the less, you do, for on your tongue

Falsehood for very shame would turn to truth.

DUCHESS

What if I do not speak at all? They say

Lovers are happiest when they are in doubt

GUIDO

Nay, doubt would kill me, and if I must die,

Why, let me die for joy and not for doubt.

Oh, tell me may I stay, or must I go?

DUCHESS

I would not have you either stay or go;  
For if you stay you steal my love from me,  
And if you go you take my love away.  
Guido, though all the morning stars could sing  
They could not tell the measure of my love.  
I love you, Guido.

GUIDO

[stretching out his hands]  
Oh, do not cease at all;  
I thought the nightingale sang but at night;  
Or if thou needst must cease, then let my lips  
Touch the sweet lips that can such music make.

DUCHESS

To touch my lips is not to touch my heart.

GUIDO

Do you close that against me?

DUCHESS



Alas! my lord,  
I have it not: the first day that I saw you  
I let you take my heart away from me;  
Unwilling thief, that without meaning it  
Did break into my fenced treasury  
And filch my jewel from it! O strange theft,  
Which made you richer though you knew it not,  
And left me poorer, and yet glad of it!

GUIDO

[clasping her in his arms]  
O love, love, love! Nay, sweet, lift up your head,  
Let me unlock those little scarlet doors  
That shut in music, let me dive for coral  
In your red lips, and I'll bear back a prize  
Richer than all the gold the Gryphon guards  
In rude Armenia.

DUCHESS

You are my lord,  
And what I have is yours, and what I have not  
Your fancy lends me, like a prodigal  
Spending its wealth on what is nothing worth.  
[Kisses him.]

GUIDO

Methinks I am bold to look upon you thus:

The gentle violet hides beneath its leaf

And is afraid to look at the great sun

For fear of too much splendour, but my eyes,

O daring eyes! are grown so venturous

That like fixed stars they stand, gazing at you,

And surfeit sense with beauty.

DUCHESS

Dear love, I would

You could look upon me ever, for your eyes

Are polished mirrors, and when I peer

Into those mirrors I can see myself,

And so I know my image lives in you.

GUIDO

[taking her in his arms]

Stand still, thou hurrying orb in the high heavens,

And make this hour immortal! [A pause.]

DUCHESS

Sit down here,  
A little lower than me: yes, just so, sweet,  
That I may run my fingers through your hair,  
And see your face turn upwards like a flower  
To meet my kiss.

Have you not sometimes noted,  
When we unlock some long-disused room  
With heavy dust and soiling mildew filled,  
Where never foot of man has come for years,  
And from the windows take the rusty bar,  
And fling the broken shutters to the air,  
And let the bright sun in, how the good sun  
Turns every grimy particle of dust  
Into a little thing of dancing gold?  
Guido, my heart is that long-empty room,  
But you have let love in, and with its gold  
Gilded all life. Do you not think that love  
Fills up the sum of life?

GUIDO

Ay! without love  
Life is no better than the unhewn stone  
Which in the quarry lies, before the sculptor  
Has set the God within it. Without love  
Life is as silent as the common reeds  
That through the marshes or by rivers grow,

And have no music in them.

DUCHESS

Yet out of these

The singer, who is Love, will make a pipe

And from them he draws music; so I think

Love will bring music out of any life.

Is that not true?

GUIDO

Sweet, women make it true.

There are men who paint pictures, and carve statues,

Paul of Verona and the dyer's son,

Or their great rival, who, by the sea at Venice,

Has set God's little maid upon the stair,

White as her own white lily, and as tall,

Or Raphael, whose Madonnas are divine

Because they are mothers merely; yet I think

Women are the best artists of the world,

For they can take the common lives of men

Soiled with the money-getting of our age,

And with love make them beautiful.

DUCHESS

Ah, dear,  
I wish that you and I were very poor;  
The poor, who love each other, are so rich.

GUIDO

Tell me again you love me, Beatrice.

DUCHESS

[fingering his collar]

How well this collar lies about your throat.

[LORD MORANZONE looks through the door from the corridor outside.]

GUIDO

Nay, tell me that you love me.

DUCHESS

I remember,  
That when I was a child in my dear France,  
Being at Court at Fontainebleau, the King  
Wore such a collar.

GUIDO

Will you not say you love me?

DUCHESS

[smiling]

He was a very royal man, King Francis,

Yet he was not royal as you are.

Why need I tell you, Guido, that I love you?

[Takes his head in her hands and turns his face up to her.]

Do you not know that I am yours for ever,

Body and soul?

[Kisses him, and then suddenly catches sight of MORANZONE and leaps up.]

Oh, what is that? [MORANZONE disappears.]

GUIDO

What, love?

DUCHESS

Methought I saw a face with eyes of flame

Look at us through the doorway.

GUIDO

Nay, 'twas nothing:

The passing shadow of the man on guard.

[The DUCHESS still stands looking at the window.]

'Twas nothing, sweet.

DUCHESS

Ay! what can harm us now,  
Who are in Love's hand? I do not think I'd care  
Though the vile world should with its lackey Slander  
Trample and tread upon my life; why should I?  
They say the common field-flowers of the field  
Have sweeter scent when they are trodden on  
Than when they bloom alone, and that some herbs  
Which have no perfume, on being bruised die  
With all Arabia round them; so it is  
With the young lives this dull world seeks to crush,  
It does but bring the sweetness out of them,  
And makes them lovelier often. And besides,  
While we have love we have the best of life:  
Is it not so?

GUIDO

Dear, shall we play or sing?  
I think that I could sing now.

DUCHESS

Do not speak,  
For there are times when all existences  
Seem narrowed to one single ecstasy,  
And Passion sets a seal upon the lips.

GUIDO

Oh, with mine own lips let me break that seal!  
You love me, Beatrice?

DUCHESS

Ay! is it not strange  
I should so love mine enemy?

GUIDO

Who is he?

DUCHESS

Why, you: that with your shaft did pierce my heart!  
Poor heart, that lived its little lonely life  
Until it met your arrow.

GUIDO



Ah, dear love,  
I am so wounded by that bolt myself  
That with untended wounds I lie a-dying,  
Unless you cure me, dear Physician.

DUCHESS

I would not have you cured; for I am sick  
With the same malady.

GUIDO

Oh, how I love you!  
See, I must steal the cuckoo's voice, and tell  
The one tale over.

DUCHESS

Tell no other tale!  
For, if that is the little cuckoo's song,  
The nightingale is hoarse, and the loud lark  
Has lost its music.

GUIDO

Kiss me, Beatrice!

[She takes his face in her hands and bends down and kisses him; a loud knocking then comes at the door, and GUIDO leaps up; enter a Servant.]

SERVANT

A package for you, sir.

GUIDO

[carelessly] Ah! give it to me. [Servant hands package wrapped in vermilion silk, and exit; as GUIDO is about to open it the DUCHESS comes up behind, and in sport takes it from him.]

DUCHESS

[laughing]

Now I will wager it is from some girl  
Who would have you wear her favour; I am so jealous  
I will not give up the least part in you,  
But like a miser keep you to myself,  
And spoil you perhaps in keeping.

GUIDO

It is nothing.

DUCHESS

Nay, it is from some girl.

GUIDO

You know 'tis not.

DUCHESS

[turns her back and opens it]

Now, traitor, tell me what does this sign mean,

A dagger with two leopards wrought in steel?

GUIDO

[taking it from her] O God!

DUCHESS

I'll from the window look, and try

If I can't see the porter's livery

Who left it at the gate! I will not rest

Till I have learned your secret.

[Runs laughing into the corridor.]

GUIDO

Oh, horrible!

Had I so soon forgot my father's death,

Did I so soon let love into my heart,

And must I banish love, and let in murder

That beats and clamours at the outer gate?

Ay, that I must! Have I not sworn an oath?

Yet not to-night; nay, it must be to-night.

Farewell then all the joy and light of life,

All dear recorded memories, farewell,

Farewell all love! Could I with bloody hands

Fondle and paddle with her innocent hands?

Could I with lips fresh from this butchery

Play with her lips? Could I with murderous eyes

Look in those violet eyes, whose purity

Would strike men blind, and make each eyeball reel

In night perpetual? No, murder has set

A barrier between us far too high

For us to kiss across it.

DUCHESS

Guido!

GUIDO

Beatrice,

You must forget that name, and banish me  
Out of your life for ever.

DUCHESS

[going towards him]

O dear love!

GUIDO

[stepping back]

There lies a barrier between us two

We dare not pass.

DUCHESS

I dare do anything

So that you are beside me.

GUIDO

Ah! There it is,

I cannot be beside you, cannot breathe

The air you breathe; I cannot any more

Stand face to face with beauty, which unnerves

My shaking heart, and makes my desperate hand

Fail of its purpose. Let me go hence, I pray;

Forget you ever looked upon me.

DUCHESS

What!

With your hot kisses fresh upon my lips

Forget the vows of love you made to me?

GUIDO

I take them back.

DUCHESS

Alas, you cannot, Guido,

For they are part of nature now; the air

Is tremulous with their music, and outside

The little birds sing sweeter for those vows.

GUIDO

There lies a barrier between us now,

Which then I knew not, or I had forgot.

DUCHESS

There is no barrier, Guido; why, I will go

In poor attire, and will follow you  
Over the world.

GUIDO

[wildly]

The world's not wide enough  
To hold us two! Farewell, farewell for ever.

DUCHESS

[calm, and controlling her passion]

Why did you come into my life at all, then,  
Or in the desolate garden of my heart  
Sow that white flower of love -?

GUIDO

O Beatrice!

DUCHESS

Which now you would dig up, uproot, tear out,  
Though each small fibre doth so hold my heart  
That if you break one, my heart breaks with it?  
Why did you come into my life? Why open  
The secret wells of love I had sealed up?

Why did you open them -?

GUIDO

O God!

DUCHESS

[clenching her hand]

And let

The floodgates of my passion swell and burst

Till, like the wave when rivers overflow

That sweeps the forest and the farm away,

Love in the splendid avalanche of its might

Swept my life with it? Must I drop by drop

Gather these waters back and seal them up?

Alas! Each drop will be a tear, and so

Will with its saltness make life very bitter.

GUIDO

I pray you speak no more, for I must go

Forth from your life and love, and make a way

On which you cannot follow.

DUCHESS



I have heard  
That sailors dying of thirst upon a raft,  
Poor castaways upon a lonely sea,  
Dream of green fields and pleasant water-courses,  
And then wake up with red thirst in their throats,  
And die more miserably because sleep  
Has cheated them: so they die cursing sleep  
For having sent them dreams: I will not curse you  
Though I am cast away upon the sea  
Which men call Desolation.

GUIDO

O God, God!

DUCHESS

But you will stay: listen, I love you, Guido.

[She waits a little.]

Is echo dead, that when I say I love you

There is no answer?

GUIDO

Everything is dead,

Save one thing only, which shall die to-night!

DUCHESS

If you are going, touch me not, but go.

[Exit GUIDO.]

Barrier! Barrier!

Why did he say there was a barrier?

There is no barrier between us two.

He lied to me, and shall I for that reason

Loathe what I love, and what I worshipped, hate?

I think we women do not love like that.

For if I cut his image from my heart,

My heart would, like a bleeding pilgrim, follow

That image through the world, and call it back

With little cries of love.

[Enter DUKE equipped for the chase, with falconers and hounds.]

DUKE

Madam, you keep us waiting;

You keep my dogs waiting.

DUCHESS

I will not ride to-day.

DUKE

How now, what's this?

DUCHESS

My Lord, I cannot go.

DUKE

What, pale face, do you dare to stand against me?

Why, I could set you on a sorry jade

And lead you through the town, till the low rabble

You feed toss up their hats and mock at you.

DUCHESS

Have you no word of kindness ever for me?

DUKE

I hold you in the hollow of my hand

And have no need on you to waste kind words.

DUCHESS

Well, I will go.

DUKE

[slapping his boot with his whip]

No, I have changed my mind,

You will stay here, and like a faithful wife

Watch from the window for our coming back.

Were it not dreadful if some accident

By chance should happen to your loving Lord?

Come, gentlemen, my hounds begin to chafe,

And I chafe too, having a patient wife.

Where is young Guido?

MAFFIO

My liege, I have not seen him

For a full hour past.

DUKE

It matters not,

I dare say I shall see him soon enough.

Well, Madam, you will sit at home and spin.

I do protest, sirs, the domestic virtues

Are often very beautiful in others.

[Exit DUKE with his Court.]

DUCHESS

The stars have fought against me, that is all,  
And thus to-night when my Lord lieth asleep,  
Will I fall upon my dagger, and so cease.

My heart is such a stone nothing can reach it  
Except the dagger's edge: let it go there,  
To find what name it carries: ay! to-night  
Death will divorce the Duke; and yet to-night  
He may die also, he is very old.

Why should he not die? Yesterday his hand  
Shook with a palsy: men have died from palsy,  
And why not he? Are there not fevers also,  
Agues and chills, and other maladies  
Most incident to old age?

No, no, he will not die, he is too sinful;  
Honest men die before their proper time.  
Good men will die: men by whose side the Duke  
In all the sick pollution of his life  
Seems like a leper: women and children die,  
But the Duke will not die, he is too sinful.

Oh, can it be  
There is some immortality in sin,  
Which virtue has not? And does the wicked man  
Draw life from what to other men were death,  
Like poisonous plants that on corruption live?  
No, no, I think God would not suffer that:  
Yet the Duke will not die: he is too sinful.

But I will die alone, and on this night  
Grim Death shall be my bridegroom, and the tomb  
My secret house of pleasure: well, what of that?  
The world's a graveyard, and we each, like coffins,  
Within us bear a skeleton.

[Enter LORD MORANZONE all in black; he passes across the back of  
the stage looking anxiously about.]

MORANZONE

Where is Guido?  
I cannot find him anywhere.

DUCHESS

[catches sight of him] O God!  
'Twas thou who took my love away from me.

MORANZONE

[with a look of joy]  
What, has he left you?

DUCHESS

Nay, you know he has.  
Oh, give him back to me, give him back, I say,

Or I will tear your body limb from limb,  
And to the common gibbet nail your head  
Until the carrion crows have stripped it bare.

Better you had crossed a hungry lioness  
Before you came between me and my love.

[With more pathos.]

Nay, give him back, you know not how I love him.

Here by this chair he knelt a half hour since;

'Twas there he stood, and there he looked at me;

This is the hand he kissed, and these the ears

Into whose open portals he did pour

A tale of love so musical that all

The birds stopped singing! Oh, give him back to me.

MORANZONE

He does not love you, Madam.

DUCHESS

May the plague

Wither the tongue that says so! Give him back.

MORANZONE

Madam, I tell you you will never see him,

Neither to-night, nor any other night.

DUCHESS

What is your name?

MORANZONE

My name? Revenge!

[Exit.]

DUCHESS

Revenge!

I think I never harmed a little child.

What should Revenge do coming to my door?

It matters not, for Death is there already,

Waiting with his dim torch to light my way.

'Tis true men hate thee, Death, and yet I think

Thou wilt be kinder to me than my lover,

And so dispatch the messengers at once,

Harry the lazy steeds of lingering day,

And let the night, thy sister, come instead,

And drape the world in mourning; let the owl,

Who is thy minister, scream from his tower

And wake the toad with hooting, and the bat,

That is the slave of dim Persephone,

Wheel through the sombre air on wandering wing!



Tear up the shrieking mandrakes from the earth  
And bid them make us music, and tell the mole  
To dig deep down thy cold and narrow bed,  
For I shall lie within thine arms to-night.

END OF ACT II.