

ACT III

SCENE

A large corridor in the Ducal Palace: a window (L.C.) looks out on a view of Padua by moonlight: a staircase (R.C.) leads up to a door with a portiere of crimson velvet, with the Duke's arms embroidered in gold on it: on the lowest step of the staircase a figure draped in black is sitting: the hall is lit by an iron cresset filled with burning tow: thunder and lightning outside: the time is night.

[Enter GUIDO through the window.]

GUIDO

The wind is rising: how my ladder shook!

I thought that every gust would break the cords!

[Looks out at the city.]

Christ! What a night:

Great thunder in the heavens, and wild lightnings

Striking from pinnacle to pinnacle

Across the city, till the dim houses seem

To shudder and to shake as each new glare

Dashes adown the street.

[Passes across the stage to foot of staircase.]

Ah! who art thou

That sittest on the stair, like unto Death

Waiting a guilty soul? [A pause.]

Canst thou not speak?

Or has this storm laid palsy on thy tongue,

And chilled thy utterance?

[The figure rises and takes off his mask.]

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti,

Thy murdered father laughs for joy to-night.

GUIDO

[confusedly]

What, art thou here?

MORANZONE

Ay, waiting for your coming.

GUIDO

[looking away from him]

I did not think to see you, but am glad,

That you may know the thing I mean to do.

MORANZONE

First, I would have you know my well-laid plans;

Listen: I have set horses at the gate

Which leads to Parma: when you have done your business

We will ride hence, and by to-morrow night -

GUIDO

It cannot be.

MORANZONE

Nay, but it shall.

GUIDO

Listen, Lord Moranzone,

I am resolved not to kill this man.

MORANZONE

Surely my ears are traitors, speak again:

It cannot be but age has dulled my powers,

I am an old man now: what did you say?

You said that with that dagger in your belt
You would avenge your father's bloody murder;
Did you not say that?

GUIDO

No, my lord, I said
I was resolved not to kill the Duke.

MORANZONE

You said not that; it is my senses mock me;
Or else this midnight air o'ercharged with storm
Alters your message in the giving it.

GUIDO

Nay, you heard rightly; I'll not kill this man.

MORANZONE

What of thine oath, thou traitor, what of thine oath?

GUIDO

I am resolved not to keep that oath.

MORANZONE

What of thy murdered father?

GUIDO

Dost thou think

My father would be glad to see me coming,

This old man's blood still hot upon mine hands?

MORANZONE

Ay! he would laugh for joy.

GUIDO

I do not think so,

There is better knowledge in the other world;

Vengeance is God's, let God himself revenge.

MORANZONE

Thou art God's minister of vengeance.

GUIDO

No!

God hath no minister but his own hand.

I will not kill this man.

MORANZONE

Why are you here,

If not to kill him, then?

GUIDO

Lord Moranzone,

I purpose to ascend to the Duke's chamber,

And as he lies asleep lay on his breast

The dagger and this writing; when he awakes

Then he will know who held him in his power

And slew him not: this is the noblest vengeance

Which I can take.

MORANZONE

You will not slay him?

GUIDO

No.

MORANZONE

Ignoble son of a noble father,
Who sufferest this man who sold that father
To live an hour.

GUIDO

'Twas thou that hindered me;
I would have killed him in the open square,
The day I saw him first.

MORANZONE

It was not yet time;
Now it is time, and, like some green-faced girl,
Thou pratest of forgiveness.

GUIDO

No! revenge:
The right revenge my father's son should take.

MORANZONE

You are a coward,
Take out the knife, get to the Duke's chamber,
And bring me back his heart upon the blade.

When he is dead, then you can talk to me
Of noble vengeance.

GUIDO

Upon thine honour,
And by the love thou bearest my father's name,
Dost thou think my father, that great gentleman,
That generous soldier, that most chivalrous lord,
Would have crept at night-time, like a common thief,
And stabbed an old man sleeping in his bed,
However he had wronged him: tell me that.

MORANZONE

[after some hesitation]

You have sworn an oath, see that you keep that oath.
Boy, do you think I do not know your secret,
Your traffic with the Duchess?

GUIDO

Silence, liar!
The very moon in heaven is not more chaste.
Nor the white stars so pure.

MORANZONE

And yet, you love her;
Weak fool, to let love in upon your life,
Save as a plaything.

GUIDO

You do well to talk:
Within your veins, old man, the pulse of youth
Throbs with no ardour. Your eyes full of rheum
Have against Beauty closed their filmy doors,
And your clogged ears, losing their natural sense,
Have shut you from the music of the world.
You talk of love! You know not what it is.

MORANZONE

Oh, in my time, boy, have I walked i' the moon,
Swore I would live on kisses and on blisses,
Swore I would die for love, and did not die,
Wrote love bad verses; ay, and sung them badly,
Like all true lovers: Oh, I have done the tricks!
I know the partings and the chamberings;
We are all animals at best, and love
Is merely passion with a holy name.

GUIDO

Now then I know you have not loved at all.
Love is the sacrament of life; it sets
Virtue where virtue was not; cleanses men
Of all the vile pollutions of this world;
It is the fire which purges gold from dross,
It is the fan which winnows wheat from chaff,
It is the spring which in some wintry soil
Makes innocence to blossom like a rose.
The days are over when God walked with men,
But Love, which is his image, holds his place.
When a man loves a woman, then he knows
God's secret, and the secret of the world.
There is no house so lowly or so mean,
Which, if their hearts be pure who live in it,
Love will not enter; but if bloody murder
Knock at the Palace gate and is let in,
Love like a wounded thing creeps out and dies.
This is the punishment God sets on sin.
The wicked cannot love.

[A groan comes from the DUKE's chamber.]

Ah! What is that?

Do you not hear? 'Twas nothing.

So I think

That it is woman's mission by their love
To save the souls of men: and loving her,
My Lady, my white Beatrice, I begin

To see a nobler and a holier vengeance
In letting this man live, than doth reside
In bloody deeds o' night, stabs in the dark,
And young hands clutching at a palsied throat.
It was, I think, for love's sake that Lord Christ,
Who was indeed himself incarnate Love,
Bade every man forgive his enemy.

MORANZONE

[sneeringly]

That was in Palestine, not Padua;
And said for saints: I have to do with men.

GUIDO

It was for all time said.

MORANZONE

And your white Duchess,
What will she do to thank you?

GUIDO

Alas, I will not see her face again.
'Tis but twelve hours since I parted from her,

So suddenly, and with such violent passion,
That she has shut her heart against me now:
No, I will never see her.

MORANZONE

What will you do?

GUIDO

After that I have laid the dagger there,
Get hence to-night from Padua.

MORANZONE

And then?

GUIDO

I will take service with the Doge at Venice,
And bid him pack me straightway to the wars,
And there I will, being now sick of life,
Throw that poor life against some desperate spear.
[A groan from the DUKE'S chamber again.]
Did you not hear a voice?

MORANZONE

I always hear,
From the dim confines of some sepulchre,
A voice that cries for vengeance. We waste time,
It will be morning soon; are you resolved
You will not kill the Duke?

GUIDO

I am resolved.

MORANZONE

O wretched father, lying unavenged.

GUIDO

More wretched, were thy son a murderer.

MORANZONE

Why, what is life?

GUIDO

I do not know, my lord,
I did not give it, and I dare not take it.

MORANZONE

I do not thank God often; but I think
I thank him now that I have got no son!
And you, what bastard blood flows in your veins
That when you have your enemy in your grasp
You let him go! I would that I had left you
With the dull hinds that reared you.

GUIDO

Better perhaps
That you had done so! May be better still
I'd not been born to this distressful world.

MORANZONE

Farewell!

GUIDO

Farewell! Some day, Lord Moranzone,
You will understand my vengeance.

MORANZONE

Never, boy.

[Gets out of window and exit by rope ladder.]

GUIDO

Father, I think thou knowest my resolve,

And with this nobler vengeance art content.

Father, I think in letting this man live

That I am doing what thou wouldst have done.

Father, I know not if a human voice

Can pierce the iron gateway of the dead,

Or if the dead are set in ignorance

Of what we do, or do not, for their sakes.

And yet I feel a presence in the air,

There is a shadow standing at my side,

And ghostly kisses seem to touch my lips,

And leave them holier. [Kneels down.]

O father, if 'tis thou,

Canst thou not burst through the decrees of death,

And if corporeal semblance show thyself,

That I may touch thy hand!

No, there is nothing. [Rises.]

'Tis the night that cheats us with its phantoms,

And, like a puppet-master, makes us think

That things are real which are not. It grows late.

Now must I to my business.

[Pulls out a letter from his doublet and reads it.]

When he wakes,
And sees this letter, and the dagger with it,
Will he not have some loathing for his life,
Repent, perchance, and lead a better life,
Or will he mock because a young man spared
His natural enemy? I do not care.
Father, it is thy bidding that I do,
Thy bidding, and the bidding of my love
Which teaches me to know thee as thou art.
[Ascends staircase stealthily, and just as he reaches out his hand
to draw back the curtain the Duchess appears all in white. GUIDO
starts back.]

DUCHESS

Guido! what do you here so late?

GUIDO

O white and spotless angel of my life,
Sure thou hast come from Heaven with a message
That mercy is more noble than revenge?

DUCHESS

There is no barrier between us now.

GUIDO

None, love, nor shall be.

DUCHESS

I have seen to that.

GUIDO

Tarry here for me.

DUCHESS

No, you are not going?

You will not leave me as you did before?

GUIDO

I will return within a moment's space,
But first I must repair to the Duke's chamber,
And leave this letter and this dagger there,
That when he wakes -

DUCHESS

When who wakes?

GUIDO

Why, the Duke.

DUCHESS

He will not wake again.

GUIDO

What, is he dead?

DUCHESS

Ay! he is dead.

GUIDO

O God! how wonderful

Are all thy secret ways! Who would have said

That on this very night, when I had yielded

Into thy hands the vengeance that is thine,

Thou with thy finger wouldst have touched the man,

And bade him come before thy judgment seat.

DUCHESS

I have just killed him.

GUIDO

[in horror] Oh!

DUCHESS

He was asleep;
Come closer, love, and I will tell you all.
I had resolved to kill myself to-night.
About an hour ago I waked from sleep,
And took my dagger from beneath my pillow,
Where I had hidden it to serve my need,
And drew it from the sheath, and felt the edge,
And thought of you, and how I loved you, Guido,
And turned to fall upon it, when I marked
The old man sleeping, full of years and sin;
There lay he muttering curses in his sleep,
And as I looked upon his evil face
Suddenly like a flame there flashed across me,
There is the barrier which Guido spoke of:
You said there lay a barrier between us,
What barrier but he? -
I hardly know
What happened, but a steaming mist of blood

Rose up between us two.

GUIDO

Oh, horrible!

DUCHESS

And then he groaned,

And then he groaned no more! I only heard

The dripping of the blood upon the floor.

GUIDO

Enough, enough.

DUCHESS

Will you not kiss me now?

Do you remember saying that women's love

Turns men to angels? well, the love of man

Turns women into martyrs; for its sake

We do or suffer anything.

GUIDO

O God!

DUCHESS

Will you not speak?

GUIDO

I cannot speak at all.

DUCHESS

Let us not talk of this! Let us go hence:

Is not the barrier broken down between us?

What would you more? Come, it is almost morning.

[Puts her hand on GUIDO'S.]

GUIDO

[breaking from her]

O damned saint! O angel fresh from Hell!

What bloody devil tempted thee to this!

That thou hast killed thy husband, that is nothing -

Hell was already gaping for his soul -

But thou hast murdered Love, and in its place

Hast set a horrible and bloodstained thing,

Whose very breath breeds pestilence and plague,

And strangles Love.

DUCHESS

[in amazed wonder]

I did it all for you.

I would not have you do it, had you willed it,

For I would keep you without blot or stain,

A thing unblemished, unassailed, untarnished.

Men do not know what women do for love.

Have I not wrecked my soul for your dear sake,

Here and hereafter?

GUIDO

No, do not touch me,

Between us lies a thin red stream of blood;

I dare not look across it: when you stabbed him

You stabbed Love with a sharp knife to the heart.

We cannot meet again.

DUCHESS

[wringing her hands]

For you! For you!

I did it all for you: have you forgotten?

You said there was a barrier between us;

That barrier lies now i' the upper chamber

Upset, overthrown, beaten, and battered down,
And will not part us ever.

GUIDO

No, you mistook:
Sin was the barrier, you have raised it up;
Crime was the barrier, you have set it there.
The barrier was murder, and your hand
Has builded it so high it shuts out heaven,
It shuts out God.

DUCHESS

I did it all for you;
You dare not leave me now: nay, Guido, listen.
Get horses ready, we will fly to-night.
The past is a bad dream, we will forget it:
Before us lies the future: shall we not have
Sweet days of love beneath our vines and laugh? -
No, no, we will not laugh, but, when we weep,
Well, we will weep together; I will serve you;
I will be very meek and very gentle:
You do not know me.

GUIDO

Nay, I know you now;
Get hence, I say, out of my sight.

DUCHESS

[pacing up and down]

O God,
How I have loved this man!

GUIDO

You never loved me.
Had it been so, Love would have stayed your hand.
How could we sit together at Love's table?
You have poured poison in the sacred wine,
And Murder dips his fingers in the sop.

DUCHESS

[throws herself on her knees]
Then slay me now! I have spilt blood to-night,
You shall spill more, so we go hand in hand
To heaven or to hell. Draw your sword, Guido.
Quick, let your soul go chambering in my heart,
It will but find its master's image there.
Nay, if you will not slay me with your sword,
Bid me to fall upon this reeking knife,

And I will do it.

GUIDO

[wresting knife from her]

Give it to me, I say.

O God, your very hands are wet with blood!

This place is Hell, I cannot tarry here.

I pray you let me see your face no more.

DUCHESS

Better for me I had not seen your face.

[GUIDO recoils: she seizes his hands as she kneels.]

Nay, Guido, listen for a while:

Until you came to Padua I lived

Wretched indeed, but with no murderous thought,

Very submissive to a cruel Lord,

Very obedient to unjust commands,

As pure I think as any gentle girl

Who now would turn in horror from my hands -

[Stands up.]

You came: ah! Guido, the first kindly words

I ever heard since I had come from France

Were from your lips: well, well, that is no matter.

You came, and in the passion of your eyes

I read love's meaning; everything you said
Touched my dumb soul to music, so I loved you.
And yet I did not tell you of my love.

'Twas you who sought me out, knelt at my feet
As I kneel now at yours, and with sweet vows,
[Kneels.]

Whose music seems to linger in my ears,
Swore that you loved me, and I trusted you.
I think there are many women in the world
Who would have tempted you to kill the man.
I did not.

Yet I know that had I done so,
I had not been thus humbled in the dust,
[Stands up.]

But you had loved me very faithfully.
[After a pause approaches him timidly.]

I do not think you understand me, Guido:
It was for your sake that I wrought this deed
Whose horror now chills my young blood to ice,
For your sake only. [Stretching out her arm.]
Will you not speak to me?

Love me a little: in my girlish life
I have been starved for love, and kindness
Has passed me by.

GUIDO

I dare not look at you:

You come to me with too pronounced a favour;

Get to your tirewomen.

DUCHESS

Ay, there it is!

There speaks the man! yet had you come to me

With any heavy sin upon your soul,

Some murder done for hire, not for love,

Why, I had sat and watched at your bedside

All through the night-time, lest Remorse might come

And pour his poisons in your ear, and so

Keep you from sleeping! Sure it is the guilty,

Who, being very wretched, need love most.

GUIDO

There is no love where there is any guilt.

DUCHESS

No love where there is any guilt! O God,

How differently do we love from men!

There is many a woman here in Padua,

Some workman's wife, or ruder artisan's,

Whose husband spends the wages of the week

In a coarse revel, or a tavern brawl,
And reeling home late on the Saturday night,
Finds his wife sitting by a fireless hearth,
Trying to hush the child who cries for hunger,
And then sets to and beats his wife because
The child is hungry, and the fire black.
Yet the wife loves him! and will rise next day
With some red bruise across a careworn face,
And sweep the house, and do the common service,
And try and smile, and only be too glad
If he does not beat her a second time
Before her child!--that is how women love.
[A pause: GUIDO says nothing.]
I think you will not drive me from your side.
Where have I got to go if you reject me? -
You for whose sake this hand has murdered life,
You for whose sake my soul has wrecked itself
Beyond all hope of pardon.

GUIDO

Get thee gone:

The dead man is a ghost, and our love too,
Flits like a ghost about its desolate tomb,
And wanders through this charnel house, and weeps
That when you slew your lord you slew it also.
Do you not see?

DUCHESS

I see when men love women
They give them but a little of their lives,
But women when they love give everything;
I see that, Guido, now.

GUIDO

Away, away,
And come not back till you have waked your dead.

DUCHESS

I would to God that I could wake the dead,
Put vision in the glazed eyes, and give
The tongue its natural utterance, and bid
The heart to beat again: that cannot be:
For what is done, is done: and what is dead
Is dead for ever: the fire cannot warm him:
The winter cannot hurt him with its snows;
Something has gone from him; if you call him now,
He will not answer; if you mock him now,
He will not laugh; and if you stab him now
He will not bleed.
I would that I could wake him!

O God, put back the sun a little space,
And from the roll of time blot out to-night,
And bid it not have been! Put back the sun,
And make me what I was an hour ago!
No, no, time will not stop for anything,
Nor the sun stay its courses, though Repentance
Calling it back grow hoarse; but you, my love,
Have you no word of pity even for me?
O Guido, Guido, will you not kiss me once?
Drive me not to some desperate resolve:
Women grow mad when they are treated thus:
Will you not kiss me once?

GUIDO

[holding up knife]

I will not kiss you
Until the blood grows dry upon this knife,
[Wildly] Back to your dead!

DUCHESS

[going up the stairs]

Why, then I will be gone! and may you find
More mercy than you showed to me to-night!

GUIDO

Let me find mercy when I go at night
And do foul murder.

DUCHESS

[coming down a few steps.]

Murder did you say?

Murder is hungry, and still cries for more,
And Death, his brother, is not satisfied,
But walks the house, and will not go away,
Unless he has a comrade! Tarry, Death,
For I will give thee a most faithful lackey
To travel with thee! Murder, call no more,
For thou shalt eat thy fill.

There is a storm

Will break upon this house before the morning,
So horrible, that the white moon already
Turns grey and sick with terror, the low wind
Goes moaning round the house, and the high stars
Run madly through the vaulted firmament,
As though the night wept tears of liquid fire
For what the day shall look upon. Oh, weep,
Thou lamentable heaven! Weep thy fill!
Though sorrow like a cataract drench the fields,
And make the earth one bitter lake of tears,
It would not be enough. [A peal of thunder.]

Do you not hear,
There is artillery in the Heaven to-night.
Vengeance is wakened up, and has unloosed
His dogs upon the world, and in this matter
Which lies between us two, let him who draws
The thunder on his head beware the ruin
Which the forked flame brings after.
[A flash of lightning followed by a peal of thunder.]

GUIDO

Away! away!
[Exit the DUCHESS, who as she lifts the crimson curtain looks back
for a moment at GUIDO, but he makes no sign. More thunder.]
Now is life fallen in ashes at my feet
And noble love self-slain; and in its place
Crept murder with its silent bloody feet.
And she who wrought it--Oh! and yet she loved me,
And for my sake did do this dreadful thing.
I have been cruel to her: Beatrice!
Beatrice, I say, come back.
[Begins to ascend staircase, when the noise of Soldiers is heard.]
Ah! what is that?
Torches ablaze, and noise of hurrying feet.
Pray God they have not seized her.
[Noise grows louder.]
Beatrice!

There is yet time to escape. Come down, come out!

[The voice of the DUCHESS outside.]

This way went he, the man who slew my lord.

[Down the staircase comes hurrying a confused body of Soldiers;

GUIDO is not seen at first, till the DUCHESS surrounded by Servants

carrying torches appears at the top of the staircase, and points to

GUIDO, who is seized at once, one of the Soldiers dragging the

knife from his hand and showing it to the Captain of the Guard in

sight of the audience. Tableau.]

END OF ACT III.