

MORTADELLO



MORTADELLO ; OR, THE ANGEL
OF VENICE

MORTADELLO

OR THE

ANGEL OF VENICE

A COMEDY

BY

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PREFACE

THIS comedy is perhaps my first serious attempt at a work of art ; previous lucubrations of mine having been works either of necessity or of piety : that is, or I felt obliged to tell the truth about something, or I was definitely inspired.

But the Angel of Venice (I protest) is a very cunning concoction. I had been revolving certain exposition by M. Henri Davray of Verlaine's skill in treating the Alexandrine ; and I couldn't let it stay there ! Hence the form. I had also been meditating on Maeterlinck's method of obtaining atmosphere ; but this went all awry.

With regard to the matter of my proposed masterpiece, my mind was perfectly clear.

It must look like a Monticelli ; it must smell like Musc ambré ; it must feel like July and August of 1911 in Paris ; and above all it must taste like the Truffles au Champagne of the Café Riche. How it sounded didn't matter so much.

Well, there were difficulties. One cannot taste Truffles

au Champagne by themselves ; they must be led up to subtly and emphatically. The jewel needs a setting. My preliminary studies for this play have consequently cost me a great deal of money, incredible toil and thought, and not a little indignation.

I may as well confess it at once ; I tried to dodge the artistic Boyg by drinking Mandarinette ; and I fear that this shameful capitulation has left manifest traces throughout much of the play.

But I cannot blame myself too severely ; I made unwearied efforts. At first I tried to obtain the proper degree of perfection on the basis of monotone—I ordered a dinner harmonized from gold to black, admitting no other ingredient. The result was lamentable, a mere Rembrandt.

I tried, too, the assemblage of Monticelli colours, framing the obsidian of the truffle in its mirrored pool of brown diamond within Homard Cardinal on the vanguard and Pêches Richeliseu on the rearguard, as is only too evident from nearly the whole of the Second Act.

And then in an evil hour, inauspicious in heaven, I took to the Salade Parisienne at the Rat Mort. I have had the strength of mind to destroy the corresponding manuscript.

I returned to the austere paths of self-denial and the Café Riche. The colour of the Homard Cardinal was too exciting, clearly ; I replaced it by Filets de Sole Dugléré. This might have served but for my weakness and folly in passing from the Truffles direct to Soufflé Rothschild.

This will be remarked in the incident of the Rialto, which is so terribly out of tone.

Of course, I have always one excuse. *I do not like any of the brandies at the Café Riche.* So that every climax was in some sense marred ; the little rift appeared in the lute of the perfect dinner. Again, the only proper wine (as far as colour goes) is tawny port or old brown sherry ; and these are not possible with Filets de Sole Dugléré ; they would even tend to over-whelm the truffles.

I resolved upon an austere and ceremonial course. Cold consommé after the melon—pale dawns of the rich gold of that Ineffable Champagne Sauce—to serve as a lustration, an asperging. Then Oeufs aux Ecrévisses—the sunrise tinged with blood—the purification by fire.

Then the full rage of that awful noon of God—the Truffles themselves.

Then, as if to hold the blaze in heaven, the brandy

I least dislike—the alleged '15—and (here is the Enchantment) *enough of it not to care any more whether I liked it or not.* This with the coffee, and a cigar long enough to last through the scene that I was writing. If there is any imperfection in this scene—the third of the Third Act—it is either the fault of the *Veuve Clicquot*, or my own fault.

This went on very well for a while, and then fresh trouble arose. The *Giaconda* was stolen from the Louvre, and my thoughts were turned for the fraction of an aeon to Lionardo when the Devil sent a young lady (from the solitudes of Mount Ushba or thereabouts) whose face and figure were identical with those of his “*Bacchus*.”

My fifth Act was completely spoiled.

She replaced my portfolio at the table where I sit under the blazoned sign of Leo in the most secret corner of the café ; and though I refrained (throughout) from the unthinkable cynicism and blasphemy of ordering truffles whenever she was there, the circle was broken. The magician was slain by a spirit that he had not even evoked. Ulysses was in the arms of Circe ; Achilles was abed with Patroclus.

The brutal Tunisian carpet-merchant, whom I must thank for Orlando, had at least contributed his mite ;

this Caucasian mistress of vice so refined and lucid that it overtopped the highest peaks of virtue, gave me not one line, one thought. I no longer aspired to be a poet ; I was content to be a Chinese God ; and of my success in this minor matter there is unhappily little doubt.

Enough of this disastrous affair. The play is ruined ; if I offer it to the public, it is that they may learn the great moral lesson, not to mix their drinks.

ALEISTER CROWLEY.

MORTADELLO ; OR, THE ANGEL
OF VENICE

- ACT I. TO KABY MOHAMMED.
II. TO ELEANORE DE CARME-FILLEUL.
III. TO VICTOR BENJAMIN NEUBURG.
IV. TO MARY D'ESTE.
V. TO IDA NELIDOFF.

*ALL THIS, AS ALL ELSE
IS DEDICATED TO
THE SWAN*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE OLD DOGE.

THE COUNT CESARE MORTADELLO.

THE THREE, the supreme secret council whose members are known only to the Doge.

THE TEN, the second secret council, whose members are known only to the Doge and The Three.

THE COUNT ALESSANDRO, an extravagant.

THE COUNT LORENZO, his friend.

THE LORD GABRIELE, a hunchback, one of The Three.

THE COUNT ALONZO, one of The Ten.

ORLANDO, a negro of the Tunisian Sudan, a bravo.

THE LEGATE OF THE POPE.

The archbishop, bishops, clergy, sbirri, gondoliers, Jew merchants, bravos, officers of state, secretary to the Doge, soldiers, sentinels, bodyguards, the governor of the prison, servants, etc.

THE COUNTESS MAGDALENA PISELLI, the widowed daughter-in-law of the Doge.

THE COUNTESS LUCREZIA SANZIO, a gay lady.

ZELINA VISCONTI, a courtesan.

THE PRINCESS MONICA ARETINO, a saint.

THE ABBESS OF THE URSULINES.

Venetian ladies, women of the people, courtesans, nuns, etc.

THE DOGE has white hair, and seventy years of age.

MORTADELLO has hair dyed dark auburn, and forty years of age. He is stout, tall and pompous.

ALESSANDRO has rough hair of fiery red, and thirty years of age.

LORENZO has scanty ashen hair, and twenty-eight years of age.

GABRIELE is a hunchbacked dwarf, very strongly built, with a large and intellectual head. He is bald, and has fifty years of age.

ORLANDO is of gigantic stature, a full negro. He has forty years of age.

THE LEGATE is an old and venerable man of ascetic and noble type.

MAGDALENA is a tall, robust, and buxom woman of thirty-five years old. Her hair is black, but her complexion pale.

LUCREZIA is a tall, robust, and voluptuous woman of twenty-five years old. Her hair is of fine gold, her eyes of pale blue, and her complexion fair and rosy.

ZELINA is small and plump. Her hair is brown, and her age nine-and-twenty, though she looks older.

MONICA is of medium height, very thin and serpent-like, her hair black and crisp ; her features like Madonna's. Her eyes are extraordinarily black, keen, and piercing. Her age is twenty. Her hands and feet are very small and white, her complexion like fine porcelain.

THE ABBESS is a gigantic and burly woman of fifty years old.

MORTADELLO; OR, THE ANGEL OF VENICE

SCENE I. *The action takes place at Venice. R. the Palazzo of MAGDALENA, C. its entrance and steps to the canal L.; its gilded and armorial mooring-posts stand L. and U.C. It is midnight, and there is no light in the palace, or on the water, but only the faint light of the stars. There is also access to the palazzo by land, a narrow passage C. along the edge of the canal. A bridge leads to this passage.*

Enter upon the bridge LORENZO and ALESSANDRO.
They lean upon the parapet.

LORENZO.

THE solemn stones upsoar ; the dimpled water smiles.
How good to see once more the City of the Isles !

ALESSANDRO. No fairer than before ; 'tis absence that be-
guiles.

Why do we love the rude, the rancid and the rotten,
The crazy and the crude ? Familiar things forgotten !
We are but ghosts renewed, not infants new-begotten.

The history of the world, ay ! and of God that made it—
All lies close coiled and curled in a babe's brain.

LORENZO. Obeyed it

His law when you discourse so airily thereon ?

I think you make the source of all things—the Sorbonne !

ALESSANDRO. Well, the three years we spent were worth a
score at home.

LORENZO. I am glad enough we went ; but all roads lead to
Rome.

ALESSANDRO. All yours to sentiment ! Well, here we are at
home.

And nobody has blabbed the news your fervour feared.

Which of our friends are stabbed, how long the Doge's
beard

Has grown in these three years, the jovial old rogue !

What course his galley steers, what girls are in the vogue !

Lucrezia anyhow is none the worse for wear ;

For here she comes, I vow !

LORENZO. O fairest of the fair !

ALESSANDRO. Zelina on her arm.

LORENZO. You craze !

You'll surely come to harm from sleeping in her rays !

Enter LUCREZIA and ZELINA.

LUCREZIA. Sandro !

ZELINA. It's Sandro !

ALESSANDRO. Yes !

LUCREZIA. We thought you were in France.

ALESSANDRO. And not such a bad guess

ZELINA. Well, what a lucky chance !

ALESSANDRO. I thought you knew my friend.

LUCREZIA. Of course.

LORENZO. Too cruel 'twere
To forget me !

ZELINA. God send a breath of ocean air !

Lorenzo, how are you ?

LORENZO. O sweetest of the sweet !

What raptures I renew ! I kiss your hands and feet !

And you, Lucrezia, deign to throw one scornful glance—

ALESSANDRO. Remember your poor swain has been three
years in France !

LUCREZIA. [*To ALESSANDRO.*] Who could be happier than
I to put in those
These hands ?

ZELINA. [*To ALESSANDRO.*] I'll rival her as far as welcome
goes.

ALESSANDRO. I've come from Paris crowned for being cold
and clever ;

Lorenzo will be found more amorous than ever.

You've ruffled all my hair ; to him your hearts are stone.

Please to make him your care, and leave my locks alone !

LUCREZIA. Cruel !

ZELINA. Too cruel !

LORENZO. [*To the women.*] Cruel ! They dipped your hearts
in Styx !

ALESSANDRO. Look here ! fair play's a jewel ; let's talk of
politics.

The Doge is older now than when I went to school—

And wiser ? Anyhow he may be still a fool.

LUCREZIA. The news is that his son is dead.

ALESSANDRO. A woman's whim ?

For doubtless every one says his wife poisoned him.

LUCREZIA. And Mortadello rules in everything but name.

ALESSANDRO. This comedy of fools ! He weds the widowed
dame ?

LUCREZIA. Why, yes ! You're shrewd as shrewd ! Lorenzo
you are dumb !

ALESSANDRO. Yes, but he's lewd as lewd ! It's all you need, in
sum !

LUCREZIA. And you're as rude as rude !

ALESSANDRO. I'm sorry ; those things come
Like lightning. Is there none makes head against him still ?

LUCREZIA. Of course, there is the one.

ALESSANDRO. That girl !

LORENZO. O miracle

Of heaven, a virgin sent from heaven in purest pity

With innermost intent to save our hapless city.

O Monica ! the meek and mystic eremite !

ALESSANDRO. No gardeners ? It's odd !—O maid of—who
God knows !

LORENZO. Her knees are worn with prayers ! With fasts her
frame is weak !

ALESSANDRO. I know—I have been there ! I could not move
or speak !

LORENZO. Yours is a loathsome mind.

ALESSANDRO. You—cultivate the same !

These ladies you might find reciprocate your flame.

With love the man who trifles, advancement surely misses—

Affairs of state one stifles with very skilful kisses !

LORENZO. She is the one bright star on Adriatic foam.

ALESSANDRO. She wrecks the stalwart spar, but floats the seaman home.

LORENZO. She is the rainbow shown in Venice' cloudy sky.

ALESSANDRO. She is the juicy bone for angels to suck dry.

LORENZO. She is the compass, she is the loadstone of the State.

ALESSANDRO. She is the one-two-three when Hebrews Calculate.

LORENZO. She is the serene saint whose prayers are pure perfume.

The soul without attaint, the bud, the beeless bloom !

LUCREZIA. Indeed, you are too sharp, dear Sandro !

ZELINA. Wicked man !

ALESSANDRO. She earns the crown and harp !

ZELINA. I am a courtesan ;

And this I tell you sir, that every fool of love

In Venice looks to her as to Our Lady above.

Would she were not thus vowed ; as Mortadello's bride

She would bring poor and proud to fight on Freedom's side.

ALESSANDRO. Listen ; in all good faith, I gladly grant you much.

Not prone to scoff, and scathe the scutcheon with a smutch.

She owes the supreme debt, a soul as pure as fair,

Cobwebs no finer, jet no blacker than her hair,

Gray clouds no grayer, wells no deeper than her eyes,

Blue skies no gayer, bells no merrier, psaltries

No holier than her laugh, most suave and sleek and slim,

Her body, the pure graff of sylph and seraphim,

Her mind a beryl-stone all faery, fleckless, flawless ;

Compared with her I own St. Thomas lewd and lawless ;

But as mills give no flour unless we put some grist in,
I ask you what her power and eminence consist in.

LUCREZIA. Oh ! she has all the love that common folk can
give her.

ALESSANDRO. It's rain from heaven above that goes to make
a river.

LUCREZIA. Springs swell it.

ALESSANDRO. True.

LUCREZIA. Beside she has wealth and rank.

ALESSANDRO. Mere foam.

LUCREZIA. But foam upon the tide of her prestige at Rome.

Niece of a pope, adored already as a saint.

ALESSANDRO. That's something like a sword !

LORENZO. And yet her followers faint.

LUCREZIA. Ah ! there's a fear abroad, a bilboes of con-
straint

The irons are not rusted that hold our folk in fee ;

And Mortadello's trusted—the trusted of the Three.

ALESSANDRO. Well, I am freedom's friend : my sword is idle
long.

When I am wanted, send.

LUCREZIA. God keep your purpose strong.

But what a blistering night !

ZELINA. I stifle.

LORENZO. Is there wind,

Should we row seaward ?

LUCREZIA. Light.

ALESSANDRO. We'll try it. Can you find

A gondola ?

LUCREZIA. There's one in the shadow.

ALESSANDRO. Gondolier !

THE GONDOLIER. Ay ! Ay ! my lord.

ALESSANDRO. Outrun the dolphin and the deer !

Murano !

LUCREZIA. [*To ALESSANDRO.*] Take my waist.

ZELINA. [*To ALESSANDRO.*] And mine.

ALESSANDRO. Oh ! not so fervent.

I'm anxious to be chaste ; Lorenzo is your servant.

LORENZO. I love them ; they despise so poor a thing as I.

ALESSANDRO. I laugh at them ; they rise to the occasion.

LORENZO. Why ?

ALESSANDRO. This was the primal curse, the climax of the rancorous.

That girls should be perverse, and cavaliers cantankerous.

[The gondola moves off L., and is met by another, closed.]

LUCREZIA. 'Tis Mortadello's crest that glitters on the prow !

ALESSANDRO. Alone—a chance to wrest the wand for Freedom now !

LUCREZIA. Oh ! quiet : nothing is prepared.

ALESSANDRO. Premeditation

Is the sure way to miss one's one small chance of salvation.

There was the chance : I bet you'll wish you had bid me brisk,

And all of us regret we did not take the risk.

[Their gondola passes off, as the closed one draws up at the steps. MORTADELLO lands and assists MAGDALENA.]

MORTADELLO. Ho, lackeys, links and torches ! Wake, you sleepy knaves !

High lady, condescend to take this hand, a slave's.

[The palace door opens, and lackeys bring torches.]

MAGDALENA. I thank you, my good lord. This hand I place
in yours.

Shall help you to hold fast our land, while life endures.

The faith of Mortadello guard, his love keep warm.

Alike his city and his ward, from hate and harm.

MORTADELLO. God grant it. All is now arranged, the council
firm.

The houses hostile or estranged all brought to term,

The Doge content, the Church well bribed, the navy ours,

None left that might have circumscribed our parted powers.

That blessed hour that joins our hearts and hands in one

Sees also the State's careless crafts in unison.

*Enter ORLANDO, by bridge. Seeing MORTADELLO, he shrinks
back into the shadow, drops to his knees, and crawls un-
perceived across the bridge, hiding on the steps, and listening
intently.*

MAGDALENA. You forget Monica.

MORTADELLO.

Alone she stands, alone.

MAGDALENA. But still she stands.

MORTADELLO.

With empty hands.

MAGDALENA.

May grasp a throne.

MORTADELLO. Nay, though the snake's unwounded, low she
cringes, crawls

And licks the dust.

MAGDALENA. I tell you no ! her strength appals.

She towers in isolation, as a spire of ice

Consummate domination has o' the precipice.

Serene, august, untroubled, cold, her prayers are worth

More than our steel, more than our gold, that bind the earth.

She has heaven's voice whose silence drowns earth's crazy
cries—

MORTADELLO. You are nervous, sweetheart,

MAGDALENA. When she frowns, my spirit dies.

MORTADELLO. Then, before God, I swear it, she shall drink
of steel !

I go now to give order. Be at peace.

MAGDALENA. I will.

And so good night. My hand is yours to bend and kiss.

Let its blood pulse what breast allures to burning bliss.

I would—I would—I know not what I would. But you
Divine it.

MORTADELLO. Ah !

MAGDALENA. The night is hot, no wind beats through
The hushed canals. So is my heart—for you, my lord,
My excellent lord ! and so—to part.

MORTADELLO. Draw out my sword !
[*She does so.*]

So, sweet, while faintest fear can threat my troth-plight wife
Shall its blade quiver and ache and fret to have her life.
Be reassured.

MAGDALENA. Death sits, your vassal, in your eyes.

MORTADELLO. I swear by Mary and the Mass, your rival dies.

MAGDALENA. Then go, my knight and king. I love you.

MORTADELLO. Queen, good-night !
[*He steps from the gondola.*]

MAGDALENA. God and his angels watch above you.

MORTADELLO. At the light
You may expect my news.

MAGDALENA. Strike swift and sure and subtle !
Snap the pale thread, my wedding gift Fate's empty shuttle !

MORTADELLO. Good-night, then, sweetheart, and God guard
you. Oars there.

MAGDALENA. Go,
And God be with you, to strike hard !

MORTADELLO. Give way, men, row !
God pleasure you with sainted sleep, and dreams of me
And the brave deed I purpose.

MAGDALENA. Keep my love of thee
In this, its token.

*[She takes a jewelled stiletto from her hair, and throws
it into the gondola.]*

MORTADELLO. Ere God's globe from the sea upstart
Its splinter shall be thrust through robe and rib to heart
[His gondola glides off.]

MAGDALENA. *enters further into the house, and the lackeys with
their torches follow and close the door. ORLANDO cautiously
rises.*

ORLANDO. Lean from the blind embrasure your bosom's
nenuphars.
To night's empurpled azure sown thick with squandered
stars ! *[The window opens, and MAGDALENA appears.]*
The heavens open !

MAGDALENA. Thou ! Orlando, thou at last !
The skies are stainless now—all day were overcast.

ORLANDO. Fair Magdalena ! Twinned the moons are ?

MAGDALENA. And my face ?

ORLANDO. How should a soul that sinned behold the utmost
grace ?

MAGDALENA. Fierce as this windless night my daylong hunger
burns.

Aches for thy sound and sight, for breast and body yearns
 What purple wraps me round in its imperial fold
 But thy bright body, wound about this breast of gold ?
 The night is hot. Night's dome is widowed of the wind.
 I choke. I dare not come. I am broken up and blind
 With passion. Bring the gondola ! Off Lido's strand
 Let me adore you on the water.

ORLANDO.

Ah ! the land

Is an unworthy soul to excite our ecstasy,
 Whose billows rise and roll and tumble like the sea.
 Lo ! heaven is scarred across by the first moonray !

[*The moon rises*

MAGDALENA.

Go !

I pant. I heave. What loss one moment is ! How slow
 The pulse of the world beats when you are not with me !

ORLANDO. Look ! how the moon defeats the silence of the sea !

I go.

[MAGDALENA *withdraws, closing the shutter. He turns
 toward the bridge for a few steps, then stops.*

She said no less, she looked no less, she swore.

No less, with equal stress, to him an hour before.

O had she said one word " I tricked the Count," may be

My dotage might have heard, love leaned to loyalty.

I know myself a fool, a thing of dross and dust,

A cunning harlot's tool, slave of a vixen's lust.

And yet—her slave. Begone ! this midnight's sea of flame

Shall stretch my soul upon its crucifix of shame.

[*Reaching the bridge, he is met by MONICA, who,
 followed by two Sisters of Mercy moves toward
 the palace, her hands folded, and her lips moving
 in prayer.*

MONICA. Our Lady of Sorrow, hear thine handmaiden of sin !
 Our Lady of Peace, be near, bestow thy peace within !
 If I have sought the hurt of any man, forgive !
 If I have soiled my skirt with even a fugitive
 Faint thought of evil, cleanse my heart and soul thereof,
 As thou dost heal all men's misdeeds with eager love.
 Our Lady of Vigilance, behold me ! I am weak.
 My life's inheritance to take there are those that seek.
 There are evil men that hunt me to destroy me—Thou
 When they arise, confront them, hear thy virgin's vow.
 Forgive them, even as I through thee am wholly shriven ;
 Let that absolve whereby all men may be forgiven !
 Turn thou their hearts to grace, accept their penitence,
 That they may see thy face, gain absolution thence !

ORLANDO. Lady, your life's in danger. While you pray,
 they plot.

MONICA. Sir, is not fear a stranger to love ?

ORLANDO.

I doubt it not.

But hate is stranger too.

MONICA. Who hates me ? I hate none.

ORLANDO. I dare not tell you who it is : I am undone
 I am the bondslave of a curse. I dare not tell.

MONICA. You are the slave of love. My lord, I know you well.

The Doge's daughter plays upon your innocence.

Ay ! and the State decays, caught by her crapulence.

Are you a man of faith, of loyalty and honour,

To save her from the scathe intrigue he's put upon her ?

[*A pause. ORLANDO is torn by conflicting emotions.*]

ORLANDO. I'll save you. Will you give your servant his
 reward ?

MONICA. That will I, as I live, if mine to give, my lord !

ORLANDO. I ask a gift supreme.

MONICA.

It suits such service done.

ORLANDO. A gift beyond all my dream, and all men's orison.

MONICA. Speak ; it is yours.

ORLANDO.

I ask a rarer prize than life.

MONICA. Take off the Sphinx's mask.

ORLANDO.

I want you for my wife.

MONICA. My lord, ask something else. I am not worthy of love.

ORLANDO. Love, if I read you, spells a word you know not of.

Therefore therein for me the supreme triumph lies.

[MONICA *hesitates and prays silently.*]

MONICA. My Venice, 'tis for thee I make the sacrifice.

Must it be so ? Behold, like babe-soft moons of snow.

Moons barely three days old, my virgin breasts aglow.

Are these worth Magdalene's, that blaze throughout the night.

The swart imperious queen's ? O read your heart aright !

Spare me, save Venice !

ORLANDO.

No. This one thing I demand.

To melt your shroud of snow, my sultry sun to brand

Your bosom with its fierce intent, its angry ray.

MONICA. Our Lady, still they pierce Thy heart.

ORLANDO.

You answer nay ?

MONICA. I answer yes !

ORLANDO.

Then wait, my plot is hatched. I dare

This hour the fearful fate. Stay hidden here ; beware

Count Mortadello !

MONICA.

He ?

ORLANDO.

He is now gone to take

Death's warrant from the Three.

MONICA. Death's warrant for my sake ?

I never injured him.

ORLANDO. A woman's hate inspires
innocent Seraphim with infamous desires !

MONICA. God pardon Magdalene !

ORLANDO. No hour for grace, alas !

[*Aside.*] For all the grace I mean shall be the *coup de grace* !

[*He goes off over the bridge. The nuns kneel at
MONICA'S feet, and clasp her knees.*

MONICA. Sisters, you heard me. Rise. Home is no more a
home.

The goal of saintship lies through gates of martyrdom.

There are virtues hard as stone ; with such the pit is paved.

There are vices that atone—if Venice may be saved !

Go, pray for me. God yet may humanize his heart.

If not, do you forget your Monica. Depart !

[*The nuns rise and go, weeping. MONICA advances ;
an ecstatic smile steals over her face, lit by the
moonrise.*

Mother of Christ ! I fare too well. By God, I feared

To have enticed his soul to hell—what devil sneered ?—

It was too much. I am bewitched. I loved him so.

Ah God ! I touched. How my soul itched let God not
know !

That strong black breast ! Those cruel lips ! Those eyes of
fire !

O bitter best, to whirl the whips of black desire !

Bruise me with lust, and tear my flesh, and drink my
blood,

One poniard thrust, one flail to thresh, one storm to flood

My life with death, my soul to char—O speak the spell !—

His branding breath to bear me far beyond heaven and hell.

Come ! let me hold my crystal cross up to the moon :
 A guess of gold were at a loss to tell its tune.
 See ! I draw slowly, lustful bliss my fond regard :
 The high and holy emblem is a poinard !
 Dipped in such slime of Afric that a spider scratch
 Is mortal. Crime so delicate shall make a match
 With Mortadello. Filthy hound ! Vile sneering goat !
 Soon my bedfellow, this be found thrust through your
 throat !

The comedy is fierce, is long, is dangerous ;
 But I am free, but I am strong, am sinuous,
 Subtle as an asp, implacable as fire or flood,
 A girl to grasp the crown of hell through wine and blood.
 Hush ! 'tis the splash of oars. Come, sweet, and bathe
 me in.

Her blood. Come splash me head to feet with scarlet sin !
*[She kneels and clasps her hands, raising her voice as
 the gondola approaches.]*

Dear Christ, preserve me from the lusts of evil men,
 Or let my martyrdom avail to save them then !
 Be pleased to pardon her whose doom unfolds, a scroll
 All scribbled sinister, do thou receive her soul
 Whose body must endure what for myself she craved.
 A dark deed and impure—but Venice must be saved !

[ORLANDO lands from the gondola.]

Oh ! is it you so soon ?

ORLANDO.

I thought I had been slow.

MONICA. Cannot we wait ?

ORLANDO.

Can June save January's snow ?

MONICA. I fear to set the tune ; I fear to cast the throw.

ORLANDO. Set back the rising moon ! Fate marches : who says no ?

Death broods upon the tide, and love beams far and wide ;
You my betrothèd bride—athwart her corpse I stride !
Hide there beneath the porch ! I'll strike upon the bell,
Kindle the fatal torch to light her soul to hell.

[He strikes the bell. MAGDALENA appears at the window, dressed.]

My Magdalena ! You are ready ? Love's the tune !

Bare me your beauty to the night and the lagoon !

MAGDALENA. I am ready. *[She disappears.]*

ORLANDO. To meet God ! your sulky soul must glide
In a darker boat than mine, and cross a colder tide.

[MAGDALENA opens the door, and comes out.]

MAGDALENA. See ! but a silken shawl between you and your
lover ! *[She opens it, spreading her arms to enfold him.]*

ORLANDO. Between you and your thrall what mysteries
uncover !

MAGDALENA. What do you mean ?

ORLANDO. Behold this crater-cup concealed.
A flower of dusky gold upon the liliated field !

[He stoops and kisses her upon the navel.]

MAGDALENA. Ay ! I have prayed what once fair Theodora
prayed,

Depth for such orisons as may content a maid.

ORLANDO. Your prayer is heard.

MAGDALENA. Is heard ?

ORLANDO. God grant me grace of guilt !

Here is my final word—this dagger to the hilt !

[He stabs her in the navel.]

MAGDALENA. Oh ! you have killed me !

MONICA. [*Coming out of shelter.*] Ay ! detested harlot !

MAGDALENA. Thou ?

MONICA. I think you will not lie with Mortadello now !

ORLANDO What, Monica the saint !

MONICA. Oh, you may see my soul !

Blood has washed off the paint ! You were my gain and
goal !

Kiss me while she still bleeds ! I am yours, your slave, your
toy,

The furrow of tropic seeds, black bliss of Afric joy—

ORLANDO. Frightful and frantic dream ! Portentous, mon-
strous omen !

I sail upon a stream of blood of slaughtered foeman !

We shall go far, go far, follow the one red star—

MONICA. Look how the scarlet scar writhes !

ORLANDO. How divine you are !

Kiss me again ! What feasts of passion to expend !

MAGDALENA. My curse !

ORLANDO. My kiss !

MAGDALENA. Black beasts !

MONICA. My kiss !

ORLANDO. It is the end.

See, mistress, let me lift this victim to the moon !

*[He takes up the corpse of MAGDALENA, and raises it
above his head.]*

MONICA. A corpse my wedding-gift !

ORLANDO. A groan my wedding tune !

There she goes, silver-swift, one plunge to the lagoon !

MONICA. Kiss me !

ORLANDO. Ay, kiss, but haste ; there are bloodhounds abroad ;

My arm about your waist, its fellow on my sword !
To the gondola !

[*The LORD GABRIELE and his sbirri appear running,
upon the bridge.*

ORLANDO. Too late ! we must face Venice now.

MONICA. I am at the height of Fate !

GABRIELE. Halt there !

ORLANDO. Who calls ?

GABRIELE. Allow

The warrant of the Three ! I have a word to speak
To the Princess.

MONICA. To me ? My lord, I am too weak
To move against your will. I only ask to go,
As is my custom still, a pilgrim to and fro
Among my poor, to heal, to comfort, to befriend—

[*She kneels before him.*

GABRIELE. Nay, lady, never kneel ! I am come in peace.
Attend !

This is my warrant. Since dissensions are so rife,
That Venice and its prince are seething with the strife
Of factions that have filled even the council hall
With violences unskilled, we mean to end it all.
You, lady, are adored by all the common folk.
Your word may be a sword.

MONICA. My lord, I never spoke.
One syllable but peace.

GABRIELE. That is the word I seek.

MONICA. The strong bid trouble cease : mere war is for the
weak.

GABRIELE. Else—here's the hand of steel ! This warrant
witnesseth.

Under the Doge's seal the order for your death.
 Count Mortadello begged the favour on his knees.
 (You may divine who egged him on to't, if you please).
 Yes, Mortadello, schooled to order, not to pray !
 But he was overruled ; my counsel, you may say.

MONICA. I thank you sir.

GABRIELE. We launch an Argo of goodwill ;
 So here's the olive-branch ; I bear it in my bill.

MONICA. Sir, I accept. This hand in innocence and truth
 Takes yours. Superbly planned your subtlety, in sooth.

GABRIELE. You say so. You must flatter. But thus my
 wisdom clinches

The bargain—a small matter.

MONICA. Ah ! here's where the shoe pinches !

GABRIELE. Subtlest of spirits ! Yet your foot's so soft and
 small

That I am free to bet it will not pinch at all.

It is but this : next week sees Mortadello wed.

You will be kind to speak—few words, but friendly said,

And in St. Mark's, at Countess Magdalena's side,

You cancel your account in giving him his bride.

ORLANDO. God's wounds !

MONICA. Forgive my friend ; he is distraught.

GABRIELE. I weigh

His words : I comprehend more than I care to say.

[To ORLANDO.] Be of good cheer, in sooth ; there's much in
 what they say.

Though love runs rarely smooth, yet love will find a
 way.

[To MONICA.] And so farewell.

MONICA. Farewell ! . . . One word. Would it accord

With your design, I spell its inner sense, my lord—
If Magdalena were my guest until the rite ?

GABRIELE. The auguries are fair ; you double my delight.
But bid your cook beware ; double the taster's share ;
Imagine my despair if . . .

MONICA. It shall be my care.

And here's a hint. You set a match ; then never let
The opponent see the threat.

GABRIELE. I am rebuked ; and yet
You will forgive me, for the habit only stains

My mind, because before my opponents had no brains.

MONICA. Farewell, then, and God have you in his holy
keeping.

I go to tend a grave where there's a widow weeping.

GABRIELE. You have doubled my regard with prudence as
with pity.

The name all give you, guardian angel of the city.

You have thrice earned, be sure !—a life both good and
great,

Protectress of the poor, and saviour of the state.

[He retires amid the sbirri.]

ORLANDO. Madwoman ! we are lost.

MONICA. Oh No ! we have gained time.

Whose star was never crossed ? Success may crown the
crime.

First, there's the corpse to find.

ORLANDO. What good is that to us ?

MONICA. There's something in my mind—it's idle to dis-
cuss—

But something whispers we shall need it.

ORLANDO.

How ?

MONICA.

Who knows ?

Dive ! Bear it heedfully.

ORLANDO.

And whither ?

MONICA.

To my house.

Here ! take my ring. I go to concentrate my power.

My sworn allies must know. I join you in an hour.

I will make time to-night, though death lurked in the curtain.

An hour for our delight, make one dream sure and certain !

Though all else fail, one hour shall spell supreme success,

The bee drink of the flower, strength link with loveliness.

ORLANDO. Torrents of ravening blood poured from the desolate steps,

Tumultuous fever of flood from the mountain that sweeps

I would drain for this inaccessible thing made mine—

The ineffable bliss, the song of the spring, to be thine !

I would drink molten gold, and walk on white-hot steel,

Once, only once to hold your body, once to feel

The annihilation of sense and spirit in your caress,

The imminent and intense bolt of your loveliness.

MONICA. Well, yours the right reward of love and death.

Time calls.

Hell's master hath toward a banquet in his halls.

I am the whirlpool's leap wherein the state shall founder

There's many now asleep next week shall slumber sounder.

[She glides over the bridge as ORLANDO, stripped, dives for the body of the LADY MAGDALENA.]

ACT II

SCENE I. *The Piazza de San Marco. In the background, the facade of the church. The people pass.*

EUPHEMIA. [*A girl of nineteen years old, very fair and lovely.*].

SO Monica relents, proclaims her rival's banns !

GIUSEPPE. [*A rough man of the world, burly and jolly.*] A proper lesson, you, you cruel courtesans !

EUPHEMIA. When was I cruel ?

MATTEO. [*A slim dainty debauchee.*]

Now, and every moment when

You are abroad with girls, and not at home with men.

MARGARITA. [*A plump common-looking girl.*] Fie ! you're a brute ! But shall we benefit at all

Now Mortadello rules ?

GIUSEPPE. Why, ortolans will fall

From heaven all ready cooked for dinner.

FILIPPO. [*A sturdy good-natured youth.*] I am sure

If Monica has given her seal and signature

To this, it must be right.

GIUSEPPE. My hero-worshipper !

But I am just as bad : I pin my faith to her.

MATTEO. She has Madonna's face ; Madonna's spirit shines

Even through her bodily veil, the moon among the pines !

EUPHEMIA. When I was ill last year she came three times to see me

NINA. [*A mad fiery woman with a satyr's face.*] She helped me through my trouble.

MARGARITA. Her money helped to free me
When I was put away by Issachar the Jew.
She gave me clothes besides.

FILIPPO. There's nothing she can do.
For Venice folk she leaves forgotten or undone.

GIUSEPPE. Yes, she's a saint of God and a friend to every one.

EUPHEMIA. She dewes us with her tears she suns us with her smiles.

MATTEO. By God, the guardian angel of the City of the Isles !
[*The crowd, in chatting, have moved up nearly off stage. L.*]

Enter R. ALESSANDRO and LUCREZIA.

ALESSANDRO. Now then to sound the core of the apple of our plot

Sweet as it was before, there's such a thing as rot.

[*MARCO, a burly bravo, enters behind.*]

Marco ! You have the nerve ? Then try these folk, and see.

MARCO. My lord, I will deserve the purse you promised me.

[*MARCO advances to the crowd.*]

Good-day, good friends ! God bless all here ! Have heard the news ?

'Twill set the city by the ears. You can't refuse

Assent : I saw myself the Doge's doctor's barge

Outside the gates.

GIUSEPPE. Whose gates ?

MARCO. [*Pointing off R., to canal.*] Why there she goes,
as large

As life, and twice as natural !

GIUSEPPE. Why then, where's he been ?

MARCO. Ha ! Ha ! you'd never guess.

EUPHEMIA. Then tell us what you mean !

MARGARITA. You great big teasing Mark ! It was Olimpia's father.

Whose knotted cherry-club teased you last Easter rather.

MARCO. Don't. Bygones should be bygones ! Though if I catch him walking

One night by the canal, I may set people talking !

MATTEO. Well, what's the news ?

GIUSEPPE. The Doge is drunk ?

FILIPPO. Or is the Pope ill ?

MATTEO. He has just heard the Turks have sacked Constantinople.

MARCO. No, but an idol breaks, a temple is defiled :

Your Princess Monica is found to be with child.

GIUSEPPE. Hum !

MATTEO. It's a dirty lie.

FILIPPO. A dirty lie !

EUPHEMIA. You hog !

MARGARITA. You filthy beast.

GIUSEPPE. It's false, I make no doubt, the dog !

I suppose you are the father.

MARCO. O ! no one knows who he is,

But she.

FILIPPO. You say't again !

NINA. A saint as sweet as she is !

Let's tear the lying tongue from him !

GIUSEPPE. To the canal !

And cool his brains ; he's mad, perhaps, the animal.

[They drag him off, struggling, towards R.]

EUPHEMIA. Duck him, and clean his heart.

MARGARTIA. Yes, duck him, the low brute.

MATTEO. No ! I've got a knife. Let's mend the matter at the root !

[ALESSANDRO *interposes, and beats off the crowd with scabbarded sword.*

ALESSANDRO. Here now ! What's this ? What's this ?

MARCO. My lord, they'll murder me.

ALESSANDRO. Why, Marco !

GIUSEPPE. My good lord, he's earning slander's fee !

ALESSANDRO. But if it should be true ?

FILIPPO. It can't be true. As well
You ask me to believe a Moslem miracle !

ALESSANDRO. Thanks, my good friends. You have done
exactly as I hope

You always will, in all the circumstances and scope
Of falsehood.

EUPHEMIA. 'Twas a jest ?

ALESSANDRO. No jest ; an earnest trial
Of how you would meet slander.

MATTEO. Discredit and denial
And vengeance topping it.

ALESSANDRO. Well, Marco, here's the purse
I promised. Earn the next by doing—nothing worse !

MARCO. Thank you, my lord. Now, girls and my good
friends, away

And drink the health of Princess Monica ! I pay.

[*The crowd go off, cheering and comforting* MARCO.]

ALESSANDRO. There is our strength, Lucrece, the folk's blind
faith in her.

LUCREZIA. So may all end in peace !

ALESSANDRO. Good soup, the end of stir.
 She has filled their folly full : now she might do her will
 At noonday with a bull, and be a virgin still !

LUCREZIA. So there's the use of fame ; it makes the fact
 forsworn.

ALESSANDRO. Count Mortadello came for wool, we'll send
 him shorn.

SCENE II. *The Cabinet of THE DOGE. It is furnished as a work-room with papers, etc. But there is a throne, with five seats on either hand. THE DOGE is with a Secretary at work. An officer is on guard at the door. A knock. The officer opens and whispers with another officer who is on guard without.*

THE OFFICER. The Lord Gabriele begs the favour of audience
 Of His Highness's most high serene magnificence.

THE DOGE. Admit him. [THE OFFICER *goes out to obey.*

Finish the draft as I said. Note down our new intents

In the matter of Turin ; rejoin me in an hour.

THE SECRETARY. I humbly take my leave, my lord.

[THE DOGE *goes to the window.*

THE DOGE. The heaven's lower

Surly and sultry still, black fiends of cloud that threat

And dare not break. [He turns, GABRIELE *has entered.*

Well, sir, and is the battle set ?

GABRIELE. All's won, my lord. Fate turns your humble
 ministress.

The Countess Magdalene is lodged with the Princess.

All Venice wild with joy ; all fear blown far and high.
A snowflake from the peak of your prosperity.

THE DOGE. See all those angry clouds that gather round the sun.

GABRIELE. And see ! they break ; he shines ! An omen !

THE DOGE. Call it one !

Is there no risk of storm before the night whose fall

Is certain as the death that must envelop all ?

GABRIELE. My lord, be of good cheer. Though dusk devour us soon.

Remember we have made alliance with the moon

THE DOGE. I am satisfied. We float, a serviceable bark.

For you remains reward, the Lion of St. Mark.

[He throws the chain and symbols over the shoulders of GABRIELE, who kneels and kisses his hand

Now, are the ten waiting ?

GABRIELE.

So I believe, my Lord.

THE DOGE. Call them !

[GABRIELE goes to the throne, and, pressing a spring, admits a number of masked nobles.

Farewell. And bid the captain of the guard
Double his men without, and the strictness of his ward.

[THE TEN range themselves. THE DOGE sits.

Lords, I have summoned you at this auspicious hour.

Hope's consummation, triumph of policy and power.

You are nameless hitherto ; to-day I may name one,

Your foremost councillor, to-morrow is my son ;—

And my successor soon, when I lay down the task.

Count Mortadello, I command you to unmask !

MORTADELLO. *[Throwing back his hood.]* Ay, it is I whose
thunders break, and worlds obey.

I who have served with you may take worship to-day.
 Swear fealty one and all before me at my knees.
 Flare out, my banner, winds adore me, utmost seas
 Carry my galleons, conquest kneel, a vassal cowed,
 Kings follow fawning at my heel, a cringing crowd.
 My fame be blazoned through the world, a ruddy Mars,
 And climb in incense scimitar-curved to storm the stars !
 Your homage, gentlemen. The oath upon my sword.

ALL. We swear to follow and obey thee as our lord.

THE DOGE. 'Tis sworn. Retire, and one by one re-entering
 Unmask, and kiss the hand of who shall be your king.

*[All bow and retire. Then they enter, unmask, kiss
 the hand of MORTADELLO, reveil and depart.]*

MORTADELLO. *[To the first.]* I am glad your worth and
 wisdom are appreciated.

[To the second.] Does the whole earth contain a wiser,
 holier head ?

[To the third.] Greetings my lord. I was sure indeed you
 were of the Ten.

[To the fourth.] Death, by my sword ! Is't you, most luck-
 less of all men ?

Poor and exiled I thought you—and I meet you here—
 I am glad you smiled—where we strike angels dumb with fear !

[To the fifth.] Why, body o' God ! you died ten years ago,
 we thought.

[To the sixth.] And you ? Am I odd ? Do eyes still serve
 me as they ought ?

My sworn foe, vowed to stab me—so the fine farce ends.
 Aw, well I know you now ; so kiss me, best of friends !

[To the seventh.] My intimate ! Have we not played as
 boys together.

Diced, drabbed, drunk, ate through fairest and through
foulest weather ?

I never thought to see you here !

[*To the eighth.*]

Due reverence

Father, I ought and do pay to your Eminence.

[*To the ninth.*] Sir, I am glad to meet you. May our
friendship lime

All joys it had imagines. Farewell for the time.

[*To THE DOGE.*] My lord, you whelm the spirit. If such
mystery

In my realm of the Ten, what shall I deem of the Three ?

THE DOGE. My son, the keys of power are in your hand this
hour.

The garden is yours ; the shower is God's ; may He grant
the flower !

MORTADELLO. Father, I take my leave ; to-morrow's busi-
ness presses.

Venice shall wake to joy-bells.

THE DOGE.

Make the wildernesses

To blossom like the rose, my God, in whom I trust.

MORTADELLO. Trust me to strike, my father.

THE DOGE.

Son, we are but dust

[*They greet solemnly, and MORTADELLO departs by the
secret entry.*]

Is it vainglory, or the confidence of youth ?

I would give half my realm for certainty of truth.

But oh ! my heart misgives me. Pshaw ! I am old ! I am
old !

All will be well, will be well. But—how these bones are cold !

SCENE III. *The steps of St. Mark's Church (as in Scene I).
A number of passers-by and loungers.*

Enter LUCREZIA and ZELINA, meeting.

LUCREZIA. And so we meet again. Where have you been this
while ?

ZELINA. Your smile's so sweet it is no wonder you beguile.

Oh ! I know well where you have been, false friend !

LUCREZIA. False friend ?

How shall I spell it ?

ZELINA. How you will. Beware the end !

LUCREZIA. I am sorry. Say what wrong I've done you.

ZELINA. You don't know ?

Who stole away my Sandro ?

LUCREZIA. Yours ! Three years ago.

Is it a crime ? Go take your mirror ; you will see

The work of time—blame him instead of blaming me !

ZELINA. Cat !

LUCREZIA. You wear badly. Paint conceals the sallow
skin.

What hides how sadly falls the flesh was fair within ?

ZELINA. So you're the vogue to-day ? Oh, we have heard of
that,

But that same rogue will turn your plumpness into fat.

LUCREZIA. You scurril thing !

ZELINA. Cat's eyes, cow's belly, and bear's feet !

If these can bring success—

LUCREZIA. Be off, and walk the street !

ZELINA. Cesspool of lust !

LUCREZIA. See, there's a beggar might take pity
And share his crust with you.

ZELINA. You scour-pot of the city !

LUCREZIA. Take care !

ZELINA. Take care of what ?

LUCREZIA. Of all your own diseases !
You poison air ; be off, and don't pollute the breezes.

ZELINA. Oh ! I'll be gone. To talk to you is too degrading.
Who ruined John of Padua ? How came Carlo's roses
fading ?

How did the brave Bandello die ? I' the lazar-hole,
Cursing.

LUCREZIA. You rave.

ZELINA. Who sent black Straparola's soul
To hell ? Your knife. Who stabbed Bartolemmeo ? You

LUCREZIA. Did Andrea's wife not spit on you ? Who robbed
the Jew

She slept with ? Faugh ! my stomach turns.

ZELINA. It shall, it shall !
Here's all the law one gives to such an animal.

*[She stabs her ; LUCREZIA wards the blow, but is
wounded in the breast.]*

LUCREZIA. Oh ! I am killed.

ZELINA. Farewell !

MORTADELLO *enters from church.*

MORTADELLO. Hold ! seize them. What ! Are brawls
Held and blood spilled beneath these venerable walls ?

Take them away, and keep them safe, to wait my pleasure.

ALESSANDRO *enters from R.*

ALESSANDRO. Your pleasure, say ? [*He draws his sword.*

MORTADELLO. Put up your sword. I have your measure.

What ? you will force me to arrest you ?

[MORTADELLO'S *attendants come forward.* LUCREZIA
staggers, and falls into ALESSANDRO'S arms.

LUCREZIA. [*Aside*]

Sandro, stay !

Follow the course agreed.

ALESSANDRO.

The dog must have his day.

Oh ! but you're hurt !

MORTADELLO.

Young man ! she shall be tended.

ALESSANDRO.

Well.

No ! take my shirt. Staunch the dear breast !

MORTADELLO.

A miracle

It missed her heart. Give thanks to God, young sir.

A PHYSICIAN, *entering hastily, L*

PHYSICIAN.

Make way !

All's well. My art can save her.

ALESSANDRO.

Sure ?

PHYSICIAN.

If skill can say !

See ! there's no dirt or venom on the dagger-blade ;

A simple hurt five days will cure. Be not afraid.

MORTADELLO. Begone then. Now's the hour when Morta-
dello strikes.

To the summit of his power, whose high-pooped galleon
rides

An inviolable tower on the torment of the tides !

Come ! I have plucked the teeth from Fate's black mouth,
the crone !

I have woven myself a wreath, I have built myself a throne.
 All glories that God seeth, is there one to top my own ?
 Bow and adore, bow down, all nations that attend
 And tremble on my frown, all lords to whom I lend
 The lustre of my crown ; for I have grasped the end
 That I set up. Behold ! who is there to undo me ?
 The mutable manifold sirens of fortune woo me.
 The stars send showers of gold to do their homage to me.

ALESSANDRO. Come, you are not a Doge yet ! And even when
 you are

Who knows if you would be descryven from a star ?

*[Some applaud, others resent, the interruption. The
 dissension grows gradually to a brawl.]*

A VOICE. Upstart !

2ND VOICE. He's right.

3RD VOICE. A quirk !

4TH VOICE. These dandies are our shame !

1ST VOICE. Down with proud lords that irk us.

3RD VOICE. What's the fellow's name ?

5TH VOICE. No brawling !

6TH VOICE. Dare you push me ?

7TH VOICE. By our Lady !

8TH VOICE. There !

There !

9TH VOICE. Good wine needs no bush.

10TH VOICE. The boaster !

7TH VOICE. Have a care !

6TH VOICE. Take that !

MONICA enters, attended by two nuns.

MONICA. Good gentlemen ! what means this stir and strife ?

Be ruled, I pray you, pen these passions for your life !
 Or you do violence to your own natures, soil
 The fiery quintessence, God's spirit, in turmoil.
 Why do you rage, a sea of angry gentlemen,
 When you should bend the knee to Mortadello ?

ALESSANDRO.

Wen !

Blotch ! Bubo ! Spider ! Leech ! Crab-apple ! Wart ! Poor-
 john !
 Carbuncle !

MONICA. Chasten speech !

[To MORTADELLO.] What grief's his grievance on ?

ALESSANDRO. Oh ! I've no special grudge against the filthy
 fellow,

But if I were a judge, I'd shorten Mortadello !

MONICA. Oh ! he's the best of men !

ALESSANDRO.

To the manners of a flunkey

He adds the brains of a hen, and the morals of a monkey.

A pig is hardly as clean as he is, when he's sober—

Which never falls between November and October.

For vermin he's a rat, for greed a shark, for grace

A duck, and lame at that, a mule for pride of race.

The peacock's vanity, the jackdaw's perky pertness,

The magpie's honesty, the tortoise's alertness ;

An elephant for hide, a spaniel for servility,

A cockatoo for pride, a sheep for imbecility,

For chastity a goat, for reticence a starling,

And, as for stink, a stoat—and there you are, my darling !

MONICA. My lord, you must forgive the youth—extravagant,

He expends in foolish froth the truth, his soul is scant.

[MORTADELLO *signifies acquiescence by a nod*

Come, Alessandro, let me soothe this raving rant !

I'll whisper, and your sea runs smooth, luxuriant.

Come, take this gallant noble's hand, he is your lord.

[ALESSANDRO *does homage, reluctantly, and takes*
MORTADELLO'S *offered hand.*

ALESSANDRO. I'd kiss the devil at your command.

MONICA.

Put up your sword !

Now, gentles all, we reconcile each warring thought,

End all our quarrel with a smile, right richly wrought.

Farewell, Count Mortadello ! Go your lordly ways,

Followed by faith and overflow of high-pitched praise.

[*To ALESSANDRO.*] For you sir, since you erred, repair your
fault I lay

This penance ; to attend me where I go to pray.

MORTADELLO. [*Still shaken by the brawl.*] Farewell, prin-
cess. I thank your kindly aid. [*He goes off, R.*

ALL.

Farewell !

We'll follow Mortadello blind to heaven or hell.

And here's good luck to the Princess, by sword and spur !

Our guardian angel in distress—all health to her !

[*They follow MORTADELLO, cheering.*

MONICA. It was well done. He sees what menace lies
beneath

The smiles that run like sunlight on my shining teeth !

ALESSANDRO. The hour draws near. The tigress springs ; I
feel her breath

Black hour of fear, whose leaden wings beat, beat like death.

MONICA. Ah ! is my breath so hot and quick and fierce and
sharp ?

Nay ! “ shuddereth the angelic prick-song on her harp.

No tigress roams the forest, preys upon mankind :

No ocean foams with fury, slays, frenzied and blind

“ The Angel of Venice has laid down at the summons of
the Lord

The wreath and harp and crown, takes up the shield and
sword.”

Or—as you will. Enough—whether one groans or smiles—
To call me still the Angel of the City of the Isles.

[They go into the church.]

SCENE IV. *The Church of St. Mark.* THE DOGE, *enthroned,
surrounded by ecclesiastical dignitaries as for a marriage.*
COUNT MORTADELLO *standing on the R. of THE DOGE.*
Many nobles gathered.

THE DOGE. The bride is late. You're sure all's well ?

GABRIELE. I stake my head.

THE DOGE. I like not the allure of the aspects. Dark and red
Broke forth the sun this morning. The sultry storm-cloud
hangs.

Heavy on Venice, scorning to flesh its lightning fangs.

She dare not practise malice ?

GABRIELE. Be reassured ! I have barred

All danger. I've her palace surrounded with the guard.

If she delay, or fail, there's order to arrest.

You catch the nightingale if you can find her nest.

MORTADELLO. This was your plan, sir, path too darkling for
my ken.

Fail ? God avert the wrath of Mortadello then.

I will have you inch by inch pushed screaming into hell—

The rack, the boot, the winch, the thumbscrews . . .

GABRIELE. *[Laughing.]* Very well !

THE DOGE. [To MORTADELLO.] Hush ! you don't know his power.

MORTADELLO. I ? who can beard me thus ?

The bridal procession enters. The corpse of MAGDALENA in bride-clothes, veiled in a great chair under a canopy borne by four negroes, MONICA, the LADY ABBESS, nuns and attendants.

GABRIELE. Look ! where she bursts, a flower, veiled and voluptuous.

Not Venus in her car by doves and sparrows drawn,
Not the ethereal star that floats above the dawn,
Not the seraphic swan that tempted Leda glowed
So white a wonder on the lake.

THE USHERS. A road ! A road !

Way for the high Princess, the bride who brings ! Make way !

MONICA. All health and happiness to all men here to-day !

With homage to the Doge my word is well begun.

Next to the most high prince invulnerable, his son.

Last, to the lords who by their attitude applaud

This day of burial to faction, feud, and fraud.

God and his blessed Son and Holy Ghost attest

Their sanction and their seal on whom we boast our best,

When in the sacred bonds of Hymen he is wed

To her we boast our fairest. Tyranny is dead

In this great hour. For me—my day of force is done ;

My mission is achieved, my latest course is run.

I have striven to save the State ; the State is saved to-day :

Now I devote my life to what it craved—to pray !

Good Mother Abbess, lend your arm, my past is furled.

Farewell, my liege, my lords, I leave at last the world !
 You who were all my thoughts, my hopes, my joys, my
 cares,

A weight to gravitate, to counterpoise my prayers,
 Need them no more. Then praise with me this period ;
 I leave you trembling as my soul draws near to God

[She goes out on the arm of THE ABBESS.]

MORTADELLO. My lords, I will have you all to know : I judged
 her ill.

So man distrusts the saintly snow on winter's hill,
 Fearing what suns of spring may send, destruction tear
 Through larch and pine to village, rend its roofs in air.
 This is God's virgin, lords : I bid your hearts with mine
 Rise in thanksgiving. Love was hid in that cold shrine.
 And now I bid you welcome well the fairest bride
 That ever graced our citadel. Great Father, guide
 Our wedded steps through joys too great to estimate,
 Our wedded deeds to decorate our storied State.
 Advance the chair. Lord Bishop, now we await your
 pleasure.

O sanction thou the rainbow vow to arch my treasure !

[The service of marriage is begun.]

THE ALLOCUTION EPISCOPAL.

All high and mighty princes are servants of the Lord,
 His holiness the sceptre, His majesty the sword.
 To you, my children, falls a task of wondrous weight :
 To life's own fardel add the burden of the State.
 I have known you from your youth ; you are worthy both
 to bear.

This globe of glory, graft the circle to the square,
 Do all in harmony, in majesty be all,
 And in humility endure what may befall.
 For you, most high Princess, yet a third load's to bear.
 The state that loves its lord is hungry for his heir.
 Ay, to this end, indeed, was marriage first ordained,
 And to this end to-day is by the Church sustained.
 Even as the Church to Christ (Beneath reflects Above !)
 You owe your lord respect, obedience, and love.

[To MORTADELLO.] As Christ delights in Her for whom He
 gave His life,

So cherish and defend and pleasure in your wife.

Now, if in Heaven indeed be made and sealed a match—
 MORTADELLO. Must this dull fool prate on till doomsday ?

Come, dispatch !

THE BISHOP. Indeed, my lord, the day is passing hot. God
 sain

And bless this union with fair auspices. Amen.

*[The ceremony proceeds. When the candles should be
 given to the betrothed, MORTADELLO disdainfully
 waves it aside, and his page holds it for him, the
 handmaiden of MAGDALENA performing the same
 office.]*

THE ARCHBISHOP. Now take your lady's hand, my lord, and
 with the oath

Supreme confirm the consummation of your troth.

Per Patrem, per Filium, per Spiritum Sanctum

Ita conjungo vos in matrimonium !

*[MORTADELLO, taking the hand of MAGDALENA,
 starts and pales. He snatches at it, and the
 corpse falls crashing forward from its chair.]*

MORTADELLO. Body and blood of God !

THE DOGE.

Death !

THE ARCHBISHOP.

Sacrilege !

GABRIELE.

Close the doors !

Let none escape !

A VOICE.

The doors are thronged.

MORTADELLO.

Swords ! Swords !

GABRIELE.

Who roars

So loud ? Keep silence, sir, or we are all undone !

MORTADELLO. Misshapen knave !

THE DOGE.

Peace, peace.

MORTADELLO.

Thou misbegotten one !

Lay hands upon the household.

[The church fills with smoke.

GABRIELE.

All's gone dark.

THE DOGE.

Gone dark !

MORTADELLO. Gone dark !

GABRIELE. Crackles and fumes ; they have Greek bombs.

MORTADELLO.

Now mark !

You shall die in torment.

GABRIELE.

Fool ! we shall all die. Hark ! hark !

[The great bell of St. Mark's begins to toll.

That cursed witch is raising Venice on us, Jesus Christ !

I'm the first fool in Europe. Stragglers must be sacrificed.

Out swords ! Compact, friends, make a phalanx, and reform

In the great square !

*[All rush out but THE DOGE, who follows tottering,
and MORTADELLO, who is bending over the corpse
of MAGDALENA.*

THE DOGE. The square is swallowed up in storm.

Give me my sword !

MORTADELLO. [*Looking out.*] Thank God ! the guards are firm. We'll drive

These angry-buzzing bees of Venice to the hive.

THE DOGE. I am surrounded by a gang of sots.

MORTADELLO. The knave !

THE DOGE. Oh, Magdalena ! oh my daughter ! Did the grave

That yawned for my old bones catch thy young antelope spring ?

MORTADELLO. Mother of God ! to find the slave that did this thing.

I'll torture first the torturers to stimulate
Device and practice.

ORLANDO. [*Rushing from behind the altar.*] Now look up and face thy fate !

It is Orlando ! Did you think to steal my swan,
Defile the blue-veined breasts this head has slept upon ?

MORTADELLO. Detested dog of Hell ! Black spawn o' the pit ! Have at thee ! [*They cross swords.*]

ORLANDO. I tupp'd her !

MORTADELLO. By the unknown black bastard that begat thee,
You shall do the like no more.

ORLANDO. Thou puny puking patch,
White-livered, yellow-bellied wittol !

MORTADELLO. Ha !
[*He wounds* ORLANDO.

ORLANDO. A scratch.
There's for your heart, if you have one ! Christ but you were near

Hell then !

MORTADELLO. Help ! Help ! I'm mastered !

ORLANDO. You're Damnation's peer

Now. Hear that dreadful bell ! Its fierce alarums toll
Count Mortadello's knell, the passing of his soul.

MORTADELLO. Fiend ! I will nail you up like vermin to a
board—

Murderer of women !

ORLANDO. I'll atone dagger with sword.

Here's your false throat, you croaking frog of hell.

THE DOGE. [*At the door.*] Help, friends !

There's a mad murderer in the church.

ORLANDO. And so it ends.

[He stabs MORTADELLO, who falls, dragging the sword with him. ORLANDO flees behind the altar and escapes, as nobles, sword in hand, re-enter and pursue him. The bell ceases to toll.]

THE DOGE. Is Mortadello slain, slain too ? O then let me
Pass with the hapless ones into Eternity ?

[He falls dead upon the corpse of MAGDALENA.]

MORTADELLO. [*Rising on one elbow.*] No, help me, loving
friends, I live. Is the day won ?

A NOBLE. Ay ! we lash home the fogs of revolution
Are you sore hurt ?

MORTADELLO. Hurt, ay ! but I shall live to flood
These two-and-seventy isles with their children's blood.

Tend me, I faint. She-wolf ! O putrid period !

[He falls again. They support him and carry him in the chair of MAGDALENA.]

Was't thou the Saint of Christ, the virgin vowed to God ?
Tigress and snake ! Black-hearted whore ! God, let me strip
Skin from flesh, alike my drouth in gore, those bowels rip
From that false belly. God ! I gasp ! Loosen my throat !
Some one calls. Hell ! Death ! O sharp asp !

ACT III

SCENE I. *The Rialto. Three Jew merchants, meeting.*

SHACKABACK.

NOW we shall know the truth, Here's Issachar.
ISRAEL. His eyes

Half starting from his head with horror and surprise.

ISSACHAR. I tell you, it is fierce. There's nothing to be done.

There's hundred lies about ; I don't trust anyone.

Some say the Doge is dead ; some say it's the Princess ;

I can't see anyone ; there's hundred lies, no less.

Look, here's the nice young Count Alonzo.

SHACKABACK. Good, my sons.

I will ask him myself : I lent him money once.

Enter ALONZO.

Good-day, my dear good lord. I pray you, what's the news ?

ALONZO. Why, nothing that can touch the pockets of
the Jews.

SHACKABACK. Oh dear, oh dear, you do not understand
our ways.

ALONZO. No, that I don't.

SHACKABACK. Why, see, whatever happens lays

A train of powder—puff it goes—and someone pays !

ALONZO. Oh, well, the Doge is dead. To-morrow they proclaim.

Succeeding in his stead Count Mortadello's name.

SHACKABACK. And where's the good Princess ?

ALONZO. With murder on her head

And riot and revolt—it's natural she fled !

SHACKABACK. They've put her at a pre ?

ALONZO. Why, no ! and that's amazing.

ISSACHAR. Here comes the crowd ; my God, is everybody crazing ?

A VOICE. [*Without.*] There goes a noble, there. Catch him and question him !

SHACKABACK. That's you they mean.

ALONZO. They dare ?

SHACKABACK. They'll tear you limb from limb.

Go quickly.

ALONZO. No. You dogs, what do you want with me ?

The crowd enter.

A RUFFIAN. Where is the murdered Monica ?

ALONZO. And what has she

To do with such a rabble ? Clear the bridge. Begone !

2ND RUFFIAN. Where is the Angel of Venice ?

ALONZO. Flown, good gadgeon, flown !

3RD RUFFIAN. 'Twas you that murdered her.

ALONZO. My clever fool, I swear

I don't know where she is, and by the Mass, don't care.

1ST RUFFIAN. She is the saint of God, the guardian of the city.

ALONZO. You should have kept her safe—you didn't. More's the pity.

I wash my hands of the whole thing. But I'll say this :
I think she aimed too high, and having made a miss,
Took her revenge.

2ND RUFFIAN. Revenge ? Blasphemer, hold your tongue.

ALONZO. Be careful, you're so beautiful, you may die young.

Doesn't your Doge's daughter lie dead—and foully dead—
Because your virgin itched for Mortadello's bed ?

1ST RUFFIAN. Over the bridge with him !

2ND RUFFIAN. Over ! [*They seize* ALONZO.

SHACKABACK. Stay friends !

3RD RUFFIAN. Dog Jew !

You say a word, we'll duck your lousy carcass too !

[*They throw* ALONZO *over the parapet.*

2ND RUFFIAN. Come On ! we'll serve the rest of them the
same.

1ST RUFFIAN. Come on !

We'll find our angel or avenge her. [*They rush on, shouting.*

ISRAEL. Lord ! He's gone.

No there's a gondolier to fish him dripping out

Just like a porpoise, all his fine clothes spoilt, no doubt
I'll tell Ezekiel.

SHACKABACK. Here, I say, there's matter more

For business than a suit of clothes. I say, before

We lend our monies out to anyone, we ought

To see the peace restored.

ISSACHAR. You speak my very thought.

Not one doubloon of mine shall leave its quiet nest

And hiding-place until these wars are laid to rest.

ISRAEL. Agreed. I'll tell the Synagogue of our resolve.

That will bring folk to reason. Hinge that won't resolve

Needs oil of peace.

SHACKABACK. They think we Jews must crouch and cringe ;

But—power's the door itself, and money is the hinge.

ISSACHAR. I see the Lord will bring his people to their own.

It's we that build the church, it's we that gild the throne.

SHACKABACK. I have a great idea ; Our bonds are good as gold.

Suppose we lent and borrowed, never bought or sold ?

ISRAEL. What do you mean ?

SHACKABACK.

Suppose we made our paper pass

All through the world, what use for silver, gold, and brass ?

ISSACHAR. Why, that's a great idea ; we could do business then

Without a coin !

SHACKABACK. Why yes ! what think you, gentlemen ?

ISRAEL. That no one would accept our paper.

ISSACHAR.

That's a bar !

SHACKABACK. When you're as old as I, you'll know what fools there are.

Well, let's be off and tell the Synagogue at once

That none may dip into our pockets for the nonce.

[They move off gesticulating.]

SCENE II. *The Cabinet of THE DOGE. A couch, on which lies the wounded MORTADELLO, convalescent. THE LORD GABRIELE stands near by, toying impatiently with his rapier.*

GABRIELE. Gone, like a shooting star. No trace.

MORTADELLO.

The omen's ill.

GABRIELE. Ay, ill indeed.

MORTADELLO.

'Tis your disgrace.

GABRIELE. Say what you will.

I own you should have had your way. But 'tis too late.

To try to call back yesterday ; for Fate is Fate.

The morrow presses.

MORTADELLO. How then went the proclamation ?

GABRIELE. No murmur or of discontent or adulation.

Absolute silence eloquent of sheer damnation.

MORTADELLO. The nobles cried ?

GABRIELE. At last they gave their loud assent.

No echo answered back from wave or firmament.

In the great heat the people stood, mute beasts, stock still.

As for the thunder waits a wood, a hush, a thrill,

A quiver—so I have seen a stag heart-stricken die.

MORTADELLO. Well, we must let no effort flag.

GABRIELE. My energy

Is all to find the Princess. Hid, who knows what spear

She may fling suddenly ?

MORTADELLO. God forbid !

GABRIELE. Suppose she appear

Whence who can tell, with what allies God only knows,

The mob, the merchants—

MORTADELLO. Pah !

GABRIELE. My spies lean to suppose

A third of us, by greed sharp spurred, would take the chance

To treble their estates. A third could make us dance

To a brick tune.

MORTADELLO. The Jews—you said ? You saw the dog ?

GABRIELE. Ay, bearded the old addlehead in Synagogue.

MORTADELLO. He furnishes the loan ?

GABRIELE. My lord his jaw snapped hard

Like an old shark's. " I can't afford it : times are hard :

Money is money : I've too much in desperate ventures ;
I've lost ten thousand sequins, such are Fate's calentures."

MORTADELLO. This is the old tale.

GABRIELE. So I sneered. He looked me hard
Between the eyes, and in his beard his malice jarred.

"Here's a doubloon : you promise me seven more to-
morrow ?

Back in my pouch I slap it. See ?"

MORTADELLO. You could not borrow

Upon the credit of the State ?

GABRIELE. Not one doubloon.

MORTADELLO. Why, this is treason !

GABRIELE. That or Fate.

MORTADELLO. Knave or buffoon,

I'll tan his hide. D'ye think he lends to the Princess ?

GABRIELE. How can I say ? She has good friends.

MORTADELLO. Mine are no less.

Where's the assassin ?

GABRIELE. The black dog—I cannot find him.

Or Satan or the Synagogue must be behind him.

Well, we must find.

MORTADELLO. If we might dare to cry a price—

GABRIELE. The powder magazine would flare—and not flare
twice.

Our safety is the doubt we spread of our intent.

MORTADELLO. Proclaim her whore.

GABRIELE. The hope that fed that lamp is spent.

On of the Ten—the Ten, I say—in jest explains

His views this morning—what's his pay ? Ducked for his
pains

MORTADELLO. They ducked a member of the Ten ?

GABRIELE. Canonical !

Straight from the bridge, the merry men ! to the canal.

MORTADELLO. He's drowned ?

GABRIELE. They fished him like a lobster.

MORTADELLO. Have I troops ?

Is it not I that speak and strike ?

GABRIELE. Your eagle swoops,

But where's the use ? The lamb is hidden underground.

MORTADELLO. Is it your Doge or dupe I am ?

GABRIELE. She shall be found.

[He turns to go.]

SCENE III. *A Charnel-House beneath the Convent of the Ursulines. It is a cellar piled with skulls and bones. There is a truckle bed, above which is a wooden crucifix. There is also a prie-Dieu and image of the Virgin, luxurious and decorative, a startling contrast to the simplicity of the rest.*

MONICA. *[Alone at the prie-Dieu.]* No news ! No word of Mortadello's fate ! No hope.

To bruise the head of the old snake, the State. No scope

To loose on him the white fangs of my hate. I grope

A night so dark, so trembling, so obscure, so fierce

No light comes filtered from the dawn, so pure to pierce

This web of woe. Ah ! God, I ache for turn of tide

At ebb. Then let the moonrise kindle and burn beside

The sunset. God ! if I have loved thee in truth, adored

As none before me, given all my youth, dear Lord,

To Thee, now hear me, hear me, hear me this one breath !

Give me this Mortadello to my kiss—and death !

Let asps lurk in the orange blossoms of my hair,
Great gasps of death strangle my Judas-love, despair
Bite deep into his heart before I draw the veil
And steep in murder, harpy's tooth and claw, my pale
Pure face, my bloodless virgin's face, to dip and bury
Its grace in his black blood, my long thin lip made merry
With mouthing at his heart-strings, and my white throat
 working,
Its drouth dissolved as the blood sucks, sucks—nightshade
 lurking
In dells of witchcraft where black Hecate shoots out
In hell's lust, her tongue, a frenzy of glee, a bout
Of death, her crimson tongue that drips, that drips with
 blood,
The breath of her dead lovers on her lips. Dear God !
Sweet Christ ! My Virgin, sweeter than the joy thou hadst
 of love
Unpriced, when to thy soft blonde nest thou had'st the
 Dove,
And crushed the Godhead to thy maiden breast, and craved
Outgushed the Unction by whose grace the blest are saved—
Sweet, sweet, oh sweeter when I twine the bond of hate
Complete about him, with one kiss to fond to mate
His soul with death, cold slime of lust, my heart. O Lord.
Control my passion. With black smiling art abhorred
Bring all to the great end. How now ? What footfalls stir
The hall ? Lucrezia ? Can she guess my suit to her ?
Ah no ! not yet. Be still in deeps of prayer intense
Bowed low ! And now may God give ear to their incense !

LUCREZIA. The Angel of Venice prays. Dear God, what rich perfume

Must flood the starry ways, a fragrant lily-bloom !

Dare I disturb the wreaths that curl toward God ?

MONICA.

Amen !

LUCREZIA. How like a babe she breathes !

MONICA. [*Rising and going to greet LUCREZIA.*] What news from Venice then ?

Why, my Lucrezia, you are fair ! The wound is healed ?

Why, well, then ! Do we still despair to take the field ?

LUCREZIA. Still in his iron gauntlet gripped the city squirms.

MONICA. Then Mortadello has not slipped off to the worms ?

No ? All the better in the end ! Your eyes shall blaze

With a new light. Ay ! foe and friend in stunned amaze

Shall see a slight not Christendom saw yet ! Now then,

Where is Orlando ? Will he come, black pearl of men ?

LUCREZIA. He comes to greet your Highness.

MONICA.

Now ?

LUCREZIA.

He is on the way.

MONICA. Then there's good hope. Not vain the vow !

LUCREZIA.

Oh !—if I may !—

While we await him, let me ask your aid in turn.

MONICA. Could I refuse you aught ?

LUCREZIA.

The task is strange and stern.

Have you seen an arrow dipped in mud, whose venom's worth

A thousand fold its bulk of blood ?

MONICA.

Ay, marshy earth

Fed by the hydra, by the toad, where witches lurk,

Speeding upon the darkmans road to their fell work !
I have seen such.

LUCREZIA. So is my thought. How should I speak
To you, all love of lilies wrought ?

MONICA. Give me your cheek
I'll kiss your fear away, sweet girl. I'll whisper things
Subtler than basilisks that furl and fold their wings
Over the serpent-heart. I guess your heart's desire.
Bend to me closer. Whisper yes.

LUCREZIA. My brain's afire.

MONICA. Then whisper.

LUCREZIA. I dare not.

MONICA. Oh dare !

LUCREZIA. My friend !

MONICA. Ah yes !

She whose black envy would not spare your loveliness !

LUCREZIA. Ay, she !

MONICA. But let me see the wound. I have a charm
By a wise hermit well attuned to heal the harm.
Fie ! what a scar ! But what a breast its hate caresses !
Is not this nipple like the crest of Etna ? Tresses
Of gold. Let down your locks ; let fall, Lucrezia, let
Their sunshine kindle mine, a pall of snaky jet !
My mouth is thin like Saturn's ring, your mouth is red
As Mars, a sword, a snake to sting, a sun to shed
Life on all wanderers in the maze of love, a moon
To curve, and Venus' self to craze.

LUCREZIA. O tender tune !

You know the secret of all sweetness.

MONICA. No ! 'tis you

Who are too fair.

LUCREZIA. My pulses beat.

MONICA. My skin sheds dew.

Now do you know me ? Can the boon you seek escape ?

Ah, but your bosom is the moon, your cheek a grape !

Mine are but baby breasts. See here ! Not worth a kiss.

There's nothing for a man to fear in this—or this.

LUCREZIA. Oh they are beautiful !

MONICA. Oh no ! but yet my soul

Is mighty, I will have you know, to gain its goal.

Now—tell me ! is it death you invoke—Zelina's death ?

You want me to give poison, choke the assassin breath !

LUCREZIA. I ask revenge—nay, justice—when you come to
power.

MONICA. So be it, I swear by Christ, Amen ! Await the hour.

LUCREZIA. Can you do nothing now ? I ache with impotence.

MONICA. Where is she ?

LUCREZIA. Know you not ?

MONICA. For the sake of God !

LUCREZIA. Offence

Alike to Heaven and Earth, she is now the universe

To Mortadello !

MONICA. Ha !

LUCREZIA. Vow changed for vow !

MONICA. My curse.

Changed for your curse ! Disdain swells every nerve and vein.

Oh ! we shall laugh again when she lies stark.

LUCREZIA. My brain

Throbs with high fever to imagine it.

MONICA. Ah, go !

I hold the lever, lure her to her overthrow

I must be alone. Device must dovetail with device.

LUCREZIA. Oh how I love you.

MONICA.

Ah ! your love. I pay its price !

Quick, to the door girl. Footsteps. 'Tis Orlando.

LUCREZIA.

Yes.

MONICA. Do up your hair. Give me one kiss. Oh loveliness !

[A knock.

Come in ! Come in ! I have waited long.

Enter ORLANDO.

LUCREZIA.

Farewell, Princess !

MONICA. Farewell—and see the guard is strong.

[*Exit* LUCREZIA.

ORLANDO.

The bloodhounds press

Hard on my heels.

MONICA.

Are we safe here ?

ORLANDO.

They cannot find

The secret passage ; have no fear.

MONICA.

Oh, love is blind.

Did you do wisely ?

ORLANDO.

Stratagem secure.

MONICA.

Then how

Goes the great chance ?

ORLANDO.

Too well for them, dear love, just now !

They have seized a few imprudent friends, they watch the rest.

Our hope is, the good Abbess sends a courier pressed

To Rome ; the Archbishop doubts his eyes and ears that saw

And heard such sacrilege. He lies at odds with law,

Hanging on the breath of Rome ; who knows what tale he has told ?

But all the people's favour flows, a tidy tide of gold,
 To us ; and prudent as the Church, the wily Jews
 Leave Mortadello in the lurch. What mischief brews
 In Gabriele's cauldron mind there's none can grasp ;
 But he stirs viciously. I find he hopes success
 If he once clenches knobby fist on you.

MONICA. May be !
 I've many a turn and many a twist for such as he.
 Well, you and I will mock his spite.

ORLANDO. A week will send
 The popular fury to its height. The church will lend
 Secret support, through blame : she hates the pride
 Of Mortadello, fans our flame, and swells our tide.
 Really, their hold upon the State slips every hour.
 Keep but the hounds at bay——

MONICA. Wait, wait—the key to power.
 Are we safe now ?

ORLANDO. I hope so.

MONICA. Then come hither and take
 Your right, most masterful of men.

ORLANDO. I thirst to slake
 My being's torment at your breast.

MONICA. If earth be all,
 I have all heaven in the rest to be your thrall.
 If earth be naught, what heaven may give who knows or
 cares ?

I only ask an hour to live—in these blue airs !

ORLANDO. Ah, give me all !

MONICA. I am your slave. Take all.

ORLANDO. Ah Christ !
 There is no man can content the grave.

MONICA. The cup is spiced,
 But there is none whose thirst may quench itself thereby,
 And there is none that dares to drench, or drain it dry.

ORLANDO. Ah, but again !

[*A dull detonation is heard without.*

MONICA. Hark ! Hark ! O what is that ?

ORLANDO. The gate !

Impossible

MONICA. Shot follows shot.

ORLANDO. They are mad.

MONICA. But wait !

All's silent now.

ORLANDO. No ! I hear cries, and blows rung hard
 On sponce and skull

MONICA. Ah ! God, hope dies.

[*Another detonation is heard.*

ORLANDO. There's the petard.

They must have blown in the two gates.

MONICA. Then we are dead.

ORLANDO. Not while this sword's unbroken.

MONICA. Fate's no friend.

ORLANDO. Unsaid

The holiest, happiest things. Here comes a guard. Pre-
 pare

For evil tidings.

MONICA. Martyrdom's to be our share.

Well, 'tis the accustomed crown of true virginity !

Ha Ha ! How God must laugh ! Do you think we must die ?

ORLANDO. They daren't kill you. And as for me, I'll sell
 my life.

So dear I doubt they have the fee.

MONICA. Once—kiss your wife !
The guard comes.

Enter a Soldier, covered with blood, his right arm hanging useless by his side. He staggers and gasps.

SOLDIER. Pardon me ! All's lost.

MONICA. Nay, say nothing yet !

Be of good courage. God's a host they have not met !

ORLANDO. What is it ?

SOLDIER. The damned hunchback 'tis so bloodily
That bears it. The two gates are his. We can but die.

ORLANDO. Is he run mad ? A convent !

SOLDIER. Mad ! he's mad with lust
And blood. Yet by his side he had the Archbishop.

ORLANDO. Trust
His wit to find a trick for that !

SOLDIER. So now we fight
In the very court.

ORLANDO. I'll hurl me at his throat to-night !

Come, sir, your sword in your left hand ! Strike one last blow !

SOLDIER. I am your servant to command.

ORLANDO. [*To MONICA.*] Now pray !

MONICA. O no !

I will compel the Christ to hear ! My fierce demands
Shall strike again the Roman's spear in those pale hands !
Go, and God guard you !

ORLANDO. Never fear ! our storm-star stands.

[*ORLANDO, with drawn sword, and the soldier rush out. MONICA kneels again at the prie-Dieu, with outstretched hands, the nails clenched tightly into*

the flesh. During her prayers she rises from height to height of hysteria.

MONICA. Thou, who wast nailed by wicked men upon the cross,
 Now hear me, assailed by villains. All my gain is loss.
 Breath fails me, dark as hell mine eyes foresee my doom,
 Death, stern and stark, the glutton shark the tomb, my bloom
 Blasted. Thy maid, Lord Christ, kept vigil before Thee,
 Fasted and prayed, endured a life's Gethsemane ;
 Now, scourged and spat upon, mocked before priest and
 king—
 Thou, gaze on thought, come crowned, come armed, come
 conquering,
 Come, save me, save thy maiden ! Strike each barbèd dart
 Home to the grave convent and cloister of my heart,
 Where all thine anguish in mine own repeats each phrase.
 There all loves languish, there all sound of prayer and praise
 Dies, there one thought alone rules with an iron rod,
 Flies to the court of our immitigable God—
 Thine, thy great word that thundered out from Calvary.
 Mine, hast thou heard ? Eli, lama Sabachthani !
 Here, every nail that pierced thy hands, that pierced thy feet,
 Spear, through the veil of thine immortal heart that beat
 With love supreme, the infinite wrath of God that bent
 Above, red beam arched fierce across the firmament,
 Each devil's dart strikes through my bosom to rend each
 chord,
 Bleach my live heart, send my soul naked to its Lord.
 Ay ! but the sweat of blood that stands upon my brow !
 Die—but not yet—more torture brands my body now,
 Pangs fierce and fierce as thine—they eat me up with pain.
 Fangs pierce and pierce, poison runs riot in every vein,

Hell surges ; all its demons yell with triumph ; fell
 Swell their appalling choirs the unutterable spell !
 Now, the last thrust—oh Jesus, bear me to thy side !
 Thou, whom I trust, my bridegroom, am I not thy bride ?

[MONICA *falls in swoon upon the prie-Dieu. A moment's silence. Then a sound of cracking wood—a door burst in—is heard ; the noise of fighting grows louder, and presently ORLANDO and five soldiers enter the Charnel, pursued by THE LORD GABRIELE and his sbirri.*

GABRIELE. Now, pay thy vices !

ORLANDO. [*At the door, turning to fight.*] Yellow dog !

GABRIELE. Black fiend !

ORLANDO. Beware,

I say, that shore thine edge away.

GABRIELE. You thresh the air !

ORLANDO. Thou vile distortion of God's image, this may
 serve.

GABRIELE. I smile. Now at him, sbirri.

ORLANDO. By thy back's crooked curve,

I'll carve thee like a capon

GABRIELE. All these months of hate

I starve to spit thee on my sword.

ORLANDO. Now meet thy fate !

GABRIELE. Dog ! falls the last of thine beside thee now,
 Death calls,

Death calls ! See rear their crests Hell's adamantine walls.

ORLANDO. I'll send thee to announce me.

GABRIELE. [*Pointing to MONICA.*] Look ! thy whore's gone
 first.

Her end be all damnation. See ! the throat that cursed

Beneath the blessings from her false lips lisped, is choked,
The teeth o' the tigress clenched in death. The heart that
smoked

Hell's lust is cold.

ORLANDO. [*Turns and sees MONICA, as he thinks, dead*] God,
then my sword drink vengeance deep !

GABRIELE. This thrust balk thy revenge !

[*GABRIELE stabs him treacherously in his amazement.*

ORLANDO. O treacherous dagger-sweep !

GABRIELE. Ay ! she's not dead, black fool ! But mine for
the torture—Drink

Black lees of hell's own wine, thy poisoned soul to sink
In mire and filth of agony, shame—Christ, I'll drench
Desire of hate in her own rotting body's stench.
But death—not death ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

ORLANDO. I am a dead man.

GABRIELE. He saith it ! Now to achieve the pinnacle of my
plan !

Princess, I arrest you in the Doge's name.

MONICA. Arrest !

GABRIELE. No less !

MONICA. [*Rising with arms outstretched.*] Nay, look, my
lord, behold my hands, my breast,

My feet !

[*It is seen that she bears the bleeding stigmata of Christ.*

GABRIELE. What !

THE SOLDIERS. 'Tis a miracle of God.

GABRIELE. You fools !

Deceit o' the devil, rather. Will you be the tools
Of a whore ?

MONICA. [*Raising her crystal cross and advancing upon him*

with power and menace.] Bow down, blasphemers, to
the cross of Christ !

GABRIELE. Once more ! Are you bewitched by sorcery,
enticed

By beauty ? I command you to arrest the woman.
Your duty !

MONICA. [*Towering over him.*] Thing misshapen, blasted and
inhuman,

Bow down to the cross ! His love purge thee ! His Passion
Save thee !

Christ crown the work ! Here is the blessing that he gave
thee !

*[She touches him with the cross. He staggers and
reels.*

GABRIELE. I am slain. O torture her ; she hath poisoned me
[He falls, and writhes in agony.

MONICA. Too true !

God's pain is deadly poison for a fiend like you
Sent from the pit to plague mankind. O soldiers, turn
Your hearts, that it may save you, all God's mercy burn
Sin from you. Follow me !

SOLDIERS. Our queen. Sweet saint of God !

GABRIELE. Spew, spew God's agony and death. Black
period

Of all my hopes. *[He dies.*

MONICA. There goes to his master a lost soul.

SOLDIERS. We'll follow you.

MONICA. Who knows the glory of my goal ?

SOLDIERS. To the palace !

MONICA. No, my friends, obey your orders still.

It is the prison that ends my passage. All my will

Is set on Christ. I pray His kingdom quickly come.

But, for myself, to-day—lead me to martyrdom.

Come hither, bind these bleeding hands together fast !

[She holds out her hands toward the soldiers, wrist to wrist.]

SOLDIERS. O we dare not !

MONICA. Your queen commands ; these are the last

Of all the words that I shall say till Heaven opes.

This is the golden gate and way of all my hopes.

THE LIEUTENANT. High saint and virgin, we obey.

MONICA. Make fast the ropes !

[They bind MONICA in silence, weeping, and lead her away.]

ACT IV

SCENE I. *A street in Venice. ALESSANDRO, upon a bridge overlooking a narrow canal. He leans heavily, weary, and decrepit.*

ALESSANDRO.

THE streets reek, shimmer, reel, crack with infernal heat ;
The sun's a raving wheel, a pulse of hell to beat
Its hammer on the hours. The heavens have let loose
Hell's harsh and horrible powers. All earth's a smouldering
fuse
Trained to the final day that fronts the Judgement seat :
The elements pass away molten with fervid heat—
I have lain prostrate, stunned, not moving hand or foot,
Morose and moribund, malevolent and mute,
Red nightmare hunting down black nightmare in my brain,
My consciousness a crown of unimagined pain,
All being dulled and dense, this one chord twanged, the lust
That stirs its somnolence, a serpent in the dust ;
The lust at last to win my Monica to me,
Bathe in the fires of sin through blind eternity !
Beat, beat ! A giant beast is throbbing in my blood—
How turn the fast to feast, the drought again to flood ?
If I could guess the thought behind those icy eyes.
I would have blithe, lithe sport with the cunning cockatrice !

Till then I do her will, plot, plan, and execute ;
 'Twill sharpen up my skill for battle with the brute,
 When, as I guess, survival of all, she reigns alone,
 A sun that brooks no rival of stars about his throne.

*[He makes a fierce gesture of love and of ambition,
 and strides vigorously away.]*

SCENE II. *Without the prison. The window of THE GOVERNOR'S room overlooks the quay, which is approached on the left by a bridge, behind which is seen the Bridge of Sighs.*

ALESSANDRO. The clouds are charged with fire. I think the time is come.

To loose the lightning flash.

LORENZO. Our lion drugged and dumb
 Stirs in his torpor ; let him rise and shake his mane,
 Open his mouth and roar !

ALESSANDRO. Well, off with you, explain
 To the Committee ! Say we fear that the Princess
 Is murdered in her cell. Send forty men express
 To cry the news aloud by street and by canal.

LORENZO. We'll hold upon the quays a merry Carnival.

ALESSANDRO. So, as crowds gather, urge them here.

LORENZO. The galleys lie
 Menacing.

ALESSANDRO. Have no fear ; their powder's none so dry.

Had Mortadello dared, we had all been dead by now.

But, as it is, the pigs may live to suck the sow.

LORENZO. I'm off, then.

[LORENZO goes off the bridge, cunning.]

ALESSANDRO. I'll hold speech with my good friend within.

Hollo there, Governor ! Come out and wag a chin !

[THE GOVERNOR *appears at the window.*

GOVERNOR. My witty Sandro ! What's the time o' day with you ?

ALESSANDRO. Past prick o' noon, I fear. And you ?

GOVERNOR. The hour of dew.

I never felt such heat.

ALESSANDRO. A devilish hot day.

Well, thank the Lord, the beach is not so far away.

Come off with me and bathe.

GOVERNOR. My God, you must be mad.

I can't leave. If you knew the trouble I have had !

ALESSANDRO. What ! the Princess has tantrums ?

GOVERNOR. No ; beyond belief

Far worse. The trouble is that every rogue and thief

Hearing she is here, goes down and slobbers on the stones,

Kisses the turnkey, deaves the captain with his groans,

Wants to repent and live a holy life henceforth,

Prays and sings hymns to avert God's overwhelming wrath,

Compares himself, dear God, to the thief upon the cross,

Pities his gaolers, doomed to everlasting loss——

ALESSANDRO. Why, but it seems you have a model set of scamps.

What harm's done ?

GOVERNOR. Harm enough when common sense decamps

It's bad enough to guard one's self against attacks,

But there's no dealing with religious maniacs.

ALESSANDRO. You fear a rising ?

GOVERNOR. Yes, by God, and here I sweat,

Wet through—why, everything but my inside is wet !

I want to bathe—I want to doff my flesh and skin,
And soak my sultry bones in water to the chin.

And here I'm tied by the leg ! Where have you been to-day ?

ALESSANDRO. I wasted half an hour, I am ashamed to say,
With an astrologer—who by his art infers
A most unlucky day for the prison governors !

GOVERNOR. Oh God, yes ! Hear that noise ?

ALESSANDRO. No. What ? that murmuring ?

GOVERNOR. That's a crowd somewhere.

ALESSANDRO. Yes ?

GOVERNOR. There'll be more rioting.

I wonder what about.

ALESSANDRO. I really can't conceive

Why, in this weather, too, folks aren't content to leave
Things quiet.

GOVERNOR. Well, they won't. Look, here's a lunatic !

Christ ! with a lamb smeared red to wave on a long stick !

*Enter on canal a gondola, with a man on its bow
waving a flag.*

THE GONDOLIER. The martyred maiden ! Men of Venice,
mark me well !

The Angel of the City's murdered in her cell !

[The gondola hastens onward.]

GOVERNOR. What next ? The fools ! I wish I knew why it's
allowed.

I'd string the devils up in a row !

ALESSANDRO. Here comes the crowd !

GOVERNOR. So much for bathing ! Off, my Sandro, or they'll
skin you !

I must give orders. *[He retires hastily from the window.]*

ALESSANDRO. Well, my friend, you've got it in you
 To the hilt this time ! [The crowd surges on the bridge.]

ALESSANDRO. Why, whatever's wrong ?

1ST VOICE. My lord,
 The Princess murdered !

ALESSANDRO. Stuff !

2ND VOICE. It's true ; it's cried abroad.

ALESSANDRO. So for a pedlar's wares ! Do you believe him ?
 Ass !

1ST VOICE. No, on my soul it's true ! I swear it by the
 Mass.

ALESSANDRO. How do you know for sure ? I'm Thomas, want
 to see
 The prints o' the nails, the wound i' the side !

2ND VOICE. It's true, trust me !

3RD VOICE. And if it's true, by God, there's not a man that
 quails.

We'll tear the prison down with our own finger-nails.

ALESSANDRO. Oh ! wait a little ! Ask the governor ; he's my
 friend.

VOICES. Cut ! Shame ! your friend ! The brute ! The traitor !

ALESSANDRO. Fiddlestick's end !
 Silence, and let me call, if it's the truth you need.

1ST VOICE. Yes, hear him, he's her friend too !

3RD VOICE. That's true !

ALESSANDRO. Yes, indeed,
 I'd give my life to-day to succour the Princess !

2ND VOICE. Ah, that's a man !

VOICES. Hurrah !

ALESSANDRO. However did you guess ?
 Peace now ! [Calls.] Hollo ! Hollo ! is that the Governor ?

Come, prick the imposthume Rumour ! These blessed
 heathen roar,
 And all the people doth imagine a vain thing,
 As David went so far one morning as to sing.
 They think your cloistered lily withered up or plucked !
 Come out, although you stream like the new aqueduct !

[THE GOVERNOR *appears at the window.*

GOVERNOR. Ah, Sandro ! what is this ? I did not hear you
 call.

I was with the Princess, conversing in the hall.

ALESSANDRO. There ! you hear that ?

GOVERNOR. What's wrong ?

ALESSANDRO. These people think she's dead.

GOVERNOR. She's just as well as you or I !

2ND VOICE. Why's he so red ?

4TH VOICE. Is it a man or a lobster ?

ALESSANDRO. Hold your tongue, you ass !

2ND VOICE. He's lying.

1ST VOICE. Yes, he talks too bold.

3RD VOICE. And false as brass !

ALESSANDRO. They're just a pack of mules.

1ST VOICE. We'll have the truth, by God !

2ND VOICE. Ay ! we'll tear down the prison ! Kill him !

ALESSANDRO. Devilish odd

That truth as sharp as steel and glittering as gold,

So hard to tell, receives no credit when it's told.

Body of Jesus, Governor ! I think you must

Have earned Cassandra's doom, betraying some God's
 trust !

1ST VOICE. Where's the Princess ?

2ND VOICE. Let's see her !

3RD VOICE. If your gargoyle spout

Truth, show us the Princess !

1ST VOICE. Ay, bring her out !

ALL. Bring her out !

ALESSANDRO. Hush, friends. That's not so mad. Come,
Governor, these folk

Are not so bad at heart—but they can't see a joke !

1ST VOICE. Devil a joke ! The angel murdered in her cell !

2ND VOICE. The martyred maiden !

3RD VOICE. Angel of Venice !

ALESSANDRO. Ding, dong, bell !

Shut up the rattle-shop, it's Mass-time ! Now—you will ?

There—he's a fine old boy !

GOVERNOR. Oh, keep the people still !

I'll bring her to the window. [*He goes.*]

ALESSANDRO. Ho ! three cheers for her

And three more for the good old Governor !

[*The crowd cheer lustily.*]

Now, friends, we look to see our virgin lily-bloom

From its shy nook expend its infinite perfume.

We are like birds that wait the whisper of the wind

Whose April words are earnest of the May behind.

We are like choirs of angels that wait seven by seven

What time aspires and assumes the Virgin to his Heaven

God ! We are—oh ! I feel her presence permeate

The air like snow, far snow, far snow from heaven's gate

That falls on distant mountains, carried as the breeze

Fans faintly through the fountains, married to all ease.

O saintly and haloes head ! O source of ecstasy.

Hope of inherited heaven and bliss to be !

She comes ! I feel it in my soul ! I flush, I faint—

Citizens, kneel ! to your knees and gaze upon your saint !

[All fall upon their knees, and with clasped hands gaze upwards to the window, where in a moment

MONICA, with arms crossed upon her breast appears.

MONICA. There is no need of West or East, of moon or sun.

The door is shut, the marriage feast of God begun.

There is a song that never tires, and there a light

More sweet and strong than all the fires of day or night

There is a taste, a savour shed ; is honey sweet,

Is moon-wort chaste ? Its flavour fed the Paraclete !

There is a grace and a perfume no earthly bower

Showers from its space of lily-bloom and passion flower.

There is a touch, sublime, caress beyond all kisses

Kissed overmuch in love's distress—they are not as this is !

Ah, me unworthy of the love of God ! me stained

With every sin, and bruised with every rod ! me drained

Of all things, given up to the great King ! me brought

By infinite mercy to his banqueting, me wrought

Out of myself, out of all earthly taint ! Me shod

Even with the silver sandals of a saint of God !

ALESSANDRO. She is with God, not upon earth !

A CITIZEN.

Ask for her prayers.

MONICA. Thy will be done, thy will, O God, not mine or theirs !

Purge me of will ! It was my wicked will that kept

Me back so long, so long, from rousing That which slept

ALESSANDRO. O Lady Monica ! can you not speak one word ?

MONICA. My ears are open, yet in sooth I have not heard.

ALESSANDRO. Pray for us !

MONICA. All my prayer is for the poor of the earth,
 Poor outcast things of little excellence or worth.

ALESSANDRO. Say, shall we rescue you ?

MONICA. Father, Thy Kingdom come !

But—dare I ask ?—not yet—I would earn martyrdom.

O men, if I must speak to men who thought no more

To speak except to God, by the Lord Christ who bore

Our sins upon the cross, I pray you pardon me

So weakling as I am, a thing of vanity.

I am jealous of my crowns ; my virgin lilies mix

With thorns of martyrdom upon my crucifix !

A CITIZEN. What can we answer ?

ALESSANDRO. Naught. Be silent and adore !

[MONICA steps back from the window, her lips still moving
 as in prayer. THE GOVERNOR comes forward to
 the window.]

GOVERNOR. Well, she's not dead, you see. Can I do some-
 thing more

To please this noble company—of stinking kelp ?

THE ABBESS. [*Rushing upon the bridge, her hair dishevelled
 and her robes torn.*] You bastard spawn of Satan,
 when I want your help

I shall know how to ask for it. You grin

Who have locked up that Saint of Jesus Christ within

Your slimy cells. I know you, Pilate !

GOVERNOR. So you mean

Mischief, I gather, Mistress Mary Magdalene !

ABBESS. Good people, can you bear him to insult me ?
 Hear

What horrors I can utter !

GOVERNOR. Horrors, never fear !

ABBESS. You goggle-eyed gudgeon ! I will tear your guts out yet.

GOVERNOR. Good Sandro, calm the lady !

ABBESS. I am calm ! Don't fret !

What, gyve and rack for that sweet saint !

GOVERNOR. She asks for it !

Can't you leave well alone ?

ABBESS. Oh, sophistry is wit

With callous dogs !

GOVERNOR. I serve the dogs ; my prisoners

Are no more slaves than I !

ABBESS. Prince of philosophers !

Here's Mortadello !

A CITIZEN. Now, my Governor !

[He throws a knife, THE GOVERNOR ducks and it just misses his head.]

GOVERNOR. *[Pointing to the assassin.]* Shoot that man !

[Two soldiers advance with cross-bows, and loose on him. He falls.]

ABBESS. Murderer ! Murderer ! Murderer !

GOVERNOR. Sandro, can

You quiet this madwoman ?

ABBESS. Mad ! no wonder if I am

My convent forced !

CITIZENS. Oh no !

ABBESS. By God and by His Lamb,

That filthy hunchback and his sbirri burst the gate

With powder.

A CITIZEN. Yes, it's true !

ALL. O infamous !

ABBESS. The State.

Ordered it. Mortadello privy to the deed !

Here he comes. Drive that dog in !

A CITIZEN. Kill him !

CITIZENS. Kill him ! Bleed

The leech ! Smash in his face ! Break up the walls for stones !

Death ! Death ! Death to the dog ! We'll batter in his bones !

[They hurl sticks and other missiles at the window. Some begin to break down the wall of the bridge, and take the stones. THE GOVERNOR and his men are driven in. MORTADELLO and a company of bowmen arrive.]

MORTADELLO. Ah, dogs, do you rebel ? You have to deal with us !

Bolt to the crossbow men ! Fuse to the arquebus !

Mow them like grass before the sickle ! They give back.

Whip them to kennel ! *[The crowd waver.]*

ABBESS. *[Rushing forward.]* Men ! are you men ? To the attack !

The tyrant's in our hands ! God is for us ! Strike hard !

Drag forth the caitliff from his hireling body-guard !

Forward the crucifix ! Do you dare loose ? For God

And His insulted church ! The path St. Peter trod !

[Brandishing a crucifix, she charges down upon MORTADELLO, the crowd following her.]

MORTADELLO. Stand firm, men ! She is mad !

ALL. Down with the tyrant, down !

ABBESS. Forward, the victor's wreath waits, or the martyr's crown !

Venice and Freedom !

MORTADELLO.

Well, since you will have it so,

Here's hand to hand will give you traitors blow for blow.

[They fight, the guard but half-heartedly, and the fury of the Abbess and the people overpowers the discipline and coolness of the others. ALESSANDRO takes no part in the fight.]

ALESSANDRO. Ho, Governor ! bring her out to the window once again,

Or you will see your Doge beneath your window slain !

[THE GOVERNOR looks out, turns sharply, and gesticulates to MONICA, who comes to the window.]

MONICA. Dear friends, good citizens ! I beg of you to hear me !

ALESSANDRO. Put up your weapons ! Hark ! The Princess speaks. *[The riot is stayed.]*

MONICA.

Come near me !

My voice is weak with tears that for your sake I shed ;

My knees are weak with prayers I uttered for your stead.

I would not for my sake one drop of blood outpoured,

One glance of anger from its scabbard drag one sword.

Nay, be my friends, be true and loyal to your Duke !

If he have injured you, it is to God you look

For justice. As for me, if insult I have borne,

False accusation heard, been put to shame and scorn.

Loaded with irons, thrust i' the prison's darkest den,

I do forgive him freely with my heart. Good men !

I ask you to disperse, escort your Doge——

ABBESS.

Not I !

I will not eat nor drink till I have seen him die !

MONICA. So said not once the Lord in His high suffering.

Will you be wounded more than Heaven's holy king ?

If He could bear the scourge, the buffet, and the cross,
 What, shall His servants burn to avenge some paltry loss ?
 For shame, good Mother ! Duke, I beg to speak with you.
 I would take counsel with you how to quell this brew
 Of witches' storm. Mount hither, I beseech you ! Friends,
 God will instruct us yet how all the turmoil ends.

Wait here, and pray for me, that wisdom may inform
 My helmsman to ride through the centre of the storm !

MORTADELLO. Princess, you earn my thanks, even as you
 break my pride.

I will speak with you, shamed. I would that I had died
 There at the hands of the mob : I might have matched you
 then.

Make way there ! God bring all to favour, gentlemen !

[The mob in angry silence make way for him to pass.

MONICA, *raising her hands in blessing, retires
 from the window.*

SCENE III. *The room of THE GOVERNOR. MONICA closes
 the window.*

MONICA. Leave me in peace, my lord, I shall not try to
 escape.

GOVERNOR. With heartiest accord.

[He goes out, with her gaolers.

Faugh ! the perspiring ape.

I may not dare to smile, lest smiles should lure a laugh.

The moment I'll beguile to write his epitaph.

I touch the goal at last ; the final ace to play.

The devil's die to cast—and mine the game to-day.
 Here he comes ! I should like to hide behind the door,
 Leap out on him and strike, one flounder to the floor,
 Bury my teeth in that bull-neck, and snap the spine,
 As a dog kills a rat. Now, manners, mouth o' mine !

The door opens and MORTADELLO enters as MONICA regains her composure. But throughout the scene she throws off her reserved and modest manner, and behaves as a shameless and alluring wanton.

MORTADELLO. And so we meet at last !

MONICA. The hour I waited for !

MORTADELLO. Its omen overcast with crimson clouds of war !

MONICA. Ah ! that's for Venice folk, good sentimental fools !

We know that life's a joke.

MORTADELLO. You play with plaguy tools !

I know you, who you are—wanton and murderess.

MONICA. Oh, if you knew how far the truth was from your guess !

MORTADELLO. Assassin, hypocrite—your sham stigmata bleed !

MONICA. O man of little wit, O bat of little breed !

They are the very scars—it was mine own surprise.

There's more beneath the stars than meets a critic's eyes.

MORTADELLO. I know you, false and vile.

MONICA. The holy wounds are there.

Think you no God can smile upon a sinner's prayer ?

MORTADELLO. If they be true, indeed, our holy faith is naught.

MONICA. Is that so strange a screed ?

MORTADELLO. The devil may have wrought

This miracle on you.

MONICA. And on St. Francis too !

Between the false and true there's wisdom's work to do.

MORTADELLO. Well, this I know for sure, you are possessed.

MONICA. Possessed ?

Ay, there lies many a lure of perfume in my breast.

MORTADELLO. Ha ! did Orlando sin with you ? I guessed aright.

MONICA. Have you no wage to win ? Day's wont to follow night.

MORTADELLO. Cynic as wanton.

MONICA. Well ? Come, you are cold, you are cold !

MORTADELLO. She-devil sprung from hell ! Where is that bosom's gold

Of Magdalene ? —cold too !

MONICA. I envied her the bliss.

Of her black love—and you ! Now, am I worth a kiss ?

MORTADELLO. I have it in my mind to end with you outright.

MONICA. And you yourself might find an end before to-night.

MORTADELLO. Oh ! you are cunning !

MONICA. Love is given wit, you know.

Begotten from above, and nourished from below !

MORTADELLO. Why did you spare my life just now ?

MONICA. Why, first of all,

I want to be your wife.

MORTADELLO. Dear God forbid !

MONICA. To enthrall

You, body and soul, to win the prize my rival won.

Do you think there is a sin I would have left undone ?

MORTADELLO. You might have ruled alone in Venice—
who's above you ?

MONICA. A cold distasteful throne—I tell you that I love you.

And then I am afraid of what the Pope may say

About the prank I played on you the other day.

And then—my smile might fall too sudden to a sob.

I don't care that [*she makes a gesture of contempt*] for all
the favour of the mob.

Your friends have real power ; mine's but the power of
storm.

It's over in an hour ; your sun is always warm.

MORTADELLO. If it were so, I think you would not be so
frank.

MONICA. Yes, but I shall not sink ; you make a perfect plank.

This hour is mine ; and this shall breed me many more.

Your Charon-fee's a kiss—and I shall come to shore.

MORTADELLO. I would as soon espouse a trull upon the
quays.

MONICA. My beauty can arouse no kinder thoughts than
these ?

Ah, but, my lord, you must forget the past, forgive

The wrong. Love springs from lust.

MORTADELLO. There's an alternative.

MONICA. O not for you ! Look here, this budding breast of
mine !

Here bleeds yet from the spear that slew my God and thine

Its wound. O fond and fierce ! Rude Roman, happiest ?

Have you no spear to pierce—oh not the baby breast ?

MORTADELLO. I tremble with disgust—thing infinitely
loathed !

MONICA. Yet in an hour we must change rings !

MORTADELLO. To be betrothed !

O let me die !

MONICA. Why yes ! and leave me to my hope

By virtue—and address—to pacify the Pope.

MORTADELLO. All I have played for, all my life long, lost !

MONICA. No, won !

There's naught beyond recall, no deed to be undone.

Take Venice, take the throne, take favour and success

All yours and yours alone—in married happiness !

A price to pay that most would call a prize to pluck !

MORTADELLO. Oh, I am like to boast of such a piece of luck !

Not for one instant dream that I'm your dupe. Your hate

Glow's forth its icy gleam from eyes emasculate !

MONICA. Oh, I will teach you how those eyes can burn and
glow,

Swear the volcanic vow within the breast of snow !

MORTADELLO. I wonder if you can.

MONICA. Yes ! yes ! you must consent.

Come ! I adore a man so stout and excellent.

I even adore the scorn and hate wherewith you load

My love.

MORTADELLO. False witch forsworn ! I loathe you like a toad :

Yet, let me own it, stirs deep in some primal slime

Some passion that prefers your crapulence and crime.

MONICA. The people wait !

MORTADELLO. Anon.

MONICA. Here is my ring.

MORTADELLO. Not yet !

My God ! I stand upon what edge ?

MONICA. Forgive : forget.

MORTADELLO. The corpse of Magdalene stands in its shroud
between us.

MONICA. The joy it would have been if only she had seen us
Thus—near—so near—so near——

MORTADELLO. She played me false !

MONICA. You know

The black rocks that uprear amid the tinted snow !

You know what fangs were fleshed on her adulterous throat,

How her perfume refreshed the rank reek of the goat !

MORTADELLO. You were his mistress too !

MONICA. I thought the form was due
Preliminal to sue exchange of troth with you.

MORTADELLO. You mock me and you shock.

MONICA. The people wait to see

Unlock the barren rock of this fine colloquy.

Which will you have ? Close furled the death-flag flutter
free ?

Or Venice and the world, the flesh, the devil—and me ?

MORTADELLO. It is my honour that you rob me of !

MONICA. I give

You glory, a tame cat.

MORTADELLO. Too false and fugitive !

MONICA. Oh, you repine too much. At least I give you life,

And in the bargain such a jewel of a wife !

MORTADELLO. Well, here's my ring. I trust because I must,
agree

Just to be all unjust !

MONICA. My lust of comedy !

[She kisses him lasciviously.]

MORTADELLO. Once you were good and chaste ?

MONICA. I really do not know :

But that I like the taste let all our future show !
Your arm about my waist—walk to the window—so !

[MORTADELLO *opens the window, and drawing MONICA to him, kisses her upturned face. The people hesitate in astonishment ; some rise ; they murmur confusedly.*

Friends, I was vowed to Christ. You know, His faithful, know
All that He sacrificed to save the world from woe :
Thus this last burden He hath laid on me to bear
To bring you liberty—the answer to my prayer.
In ignorance I asked the crown of martyrdom ;
My soul serenely basked in that sun's holy home.
How finer far the work now given me to do,
My service not to shirk, a service all for you !
It were an easy ascent to heaven, to have died.
How harder to consent to be your Doge's bride !
Praise me not ; still I smart ; half renegade I rank me
But no Venetian heart that shall not learn to thank me !

ALESSANDRO. [*Without.*] Praise to the King of Kings ! we
bow before His will.

She hath not soiled her wings ; she is out Angel still !

[*The people break into a tumult of rejoicing. MORTADELLO and MONICA, after acknowledgement, close the window.*

MORTADELLO. It may be love or hate, a wanton and a fool.
But we have saved the State.

MONICA. I think you mean, we rule.

MORTADELLO. I wish your eyes could speak !

MONICA. They shall, when night's abroad.

MORTADELLO. I fear I have been weak.

MONICA. Repent so soon, my lord ?

MORTADELLO. Ah, no! by God I'm glad! You are a sorceress!

MONICA. And all the pains I've had lead onward to success.

MORTADELLO. Where shall I lead you now?

MONICA. To my own house, I pray.

MORTADELLO. And will your love allow the word I have to say?

MONICA. Ah, my lord, your fool will whisper by and by.

I am faint yet—we rule in Venice, you and I!

[They go toward the door, her hand upon his shoulder, her face, turned away from him, illumined with a sinister smile.]

ACT V

SCENE I. *The Garden of the Palace of* COUNT ALESSANDRO.
Parties of nobles and their ladies are strolling up and down. THE DOGE and his bride are present. L. is a pavilion of stone pillars with a canopy ; on the ledges are boxes with poppies and other flowers.

MORTADELLO.

STILL heavy hangs the heat ; the sleepy waters swoon.
October may repeat the menaces of June.

ALESSANDRO. Death has a drum to beat to his eternal tune.

MORTADELLO. Why, man, you're gloomy still ; the weather's cause enough.

ALESSANDRO. No, highness, I am ill ; I have been crossed in love.

MORTADELLO. Love's easy to be won.

ALESSANDRO. My lord, you find it so.

It's simple for the sun to set the field aglow !

But I'm a star obscure, fantastical, forsooth !

And how should I allure and catch capricious youth ?

MORTADELLO. Well, may you win ! But how allure the wanton air

To breathe upon my brow ? I tell you, I despair.

Your garden has a touch of freshness, I admit.

ALESSANDRO. A little but not much.

MORTADELLO. But Venice is the pit.

ALESSANDRO. I sometimes think we are dead, not knowing
it at all ;

This solid earth we tread hell's hated littoral !

Damned beyond hope long since !

MORTADELLO. And how does love support your
Fine theory ?

ALESSANDRO. Why, prince, the girls inflict the torture.

MORTADELLO. Prince ! Then your jest is sharp. You make
me out the devil !

ALESSANDRO. No ! Orpheus with his harp to lure us to the
level !

Enter LUCREZIA *and* MONICA.

MORTADELLO. Thus far I am with you, the summer rivals
Hades.

ALESSANDRO. The Church is wiser, too, to leave alone the
ladies.

LUCREZIA. What, will you hear it said, the husband of a
moon ?

MORTADELLO. But he has lost his head already.

ALESSANDRO. Late in June
It went to seek my heart that I had lost in May.

LUCREZIA. I wish I had the art to find them both to-day.

ALESSANDRO. What would you do with them ?

LUCREZIA. Why, throw them to the fish.

MONICA, And I've got a stratagem to win the wench her wish.

ALESSANDRO. You jest ?

MONICA. Not I !

MORTADELLO. Indeed, the Princess never smiles.

MONICA. You wrong yourself. I need the City of the Isles.

Under my lord to reach incredible success.

But he has wit to teach—a smile and a caress.

MORTADELLO. Yet you are to instruct our Sandro how to
woo !

MONICA. This is the usufruct of your instruction too !

MORTADELLO. I own defeat of wit. Fair lady, lead me hence !

[LUCREZIA goes on MORTADELLO'S arm.

MONICA. Be merciful to it !

LUCREZIA. O trust my indolence !

MORTADELLO. She scorns to measure swords.

LUCREZIA. Indeed, it is the heat.

ALESSANDRO. Your lady's laugh accords.

MORTADELLO. The masculine's effete.

[He goes off flirting with LUCREZIA.

MONICA. See Mortadello bloom, a poppy !

ALESSANDRO. Which you nip.

Its colour and perfume were stolen from your lip.

MONICA. I dare not take my own.

ALESSANDRO. Not I the flower I need.

MONICA. My hope is overblown, yet will not scatter seed.

ALESSANDRO. A prudent gardener prunes ; but shall I fix the
graff ?

MONICA. Write me this afternoon's intimate epitaph ?

ALESSANDRO. You know I do not dare.

MONICA. Till now you have dared all.

There is a God whose care lets never a sparrow fall.

ALESSANDRO. If Lesbia laughs, I would.

MONICA. [*Folding her hands in prayer.*] Take care, you
lose your labour.

ALESSANDRO. Does love for God exclude a passion for your
neighbor ?

MONICA. While Mortadello lives I shall be faithful to him.

ALESSANDRO. What confidence that gives !

MONICA. I'll teach you how to woo him.

ALESSANDRO. Ah ! must it then be thus ? The cup, and not
the knife ?

MONICA. Ay ! have a thought for us ! Remember I'm his
wife,

And if I would be yours——

ALESSANDRO. The scandal must be hid——

Sepulture that secures.

MONICA. A leaden coffin-lid

Scrawled with so fierce a face that none may ever dare

Uplift the carapace for fear——what may be there.

ALESSANDRO. It is no easy road to mine——our——heart's
desire.

MONICA. Is it not sharp, the goad ? Does it not burn, the fire ?

ALESSANDRO. Nay, wit is brought to term.

MONICA. The spirit is unwilling,

Although the flesh is firm ?

ALESSANDRO. Through flesh and spirit thrilling

Sings the exultant pang——but does not tell me how.

MONICA. Mine feels the equal fang——to catch the naked
Now

Seems almost Fate——but I say Nay, say Nay, say Nay.

I have taught myself to die rather than disobey.

ALESSANDRO. You are——

MONICA. Don't talk of me ! Nor will I talk of you.

Speak of the thing that we must do——that we must do.

ALESSANDRO. Of that speak least of all—I will devise a plan.

Here——to his funeral——so loudly struts our man.

[MORTADELLO *and* LUCREZIA *return.*

So Duke, decide ! I say these red poppies lack
The juices of Cathay.

MORTADELLO. Ah ! you are on the track.

'Tis the white poppy holds poison and death.

MONICA.

Ah, well !

The whitest soul enfolds all mysteries of hell.

ALESSANDRO. Ah ! there's a mystic's truth.

MONICA.

Saint Paul infers the same.

All beauty and all youth but feed the eternal flame.

Saints know, and only saints, the horrors of the soul,

Its foul and fiery taints, its nigromancer's scroll.

Kneel, and love God. Enough if you would fathom hell !

The Path is straight and rough.

MORTADELLO.

If only it end well.

For me the easy way has always proved the best.

MONICA. So it may seem to-day, but death's a surer test.

ALESSANDRO. O ! we are all oppressed by this dull haze
that hangs.

I laugh at gibe or jest—and only show my fangs.

If God would send an air to stir the slack lagoon,

We should be flinging care, a bubble, to the moon.

MORTADELLO. Maybe ; for still the scroll of heaven's anger
lowers.

MONICA. [*To LUCREZIA.*] Come, sweetheart, shall we stroll
awhile among the flowers ?

We'll leave the men together to prattle politics.

LUCREZIA. And scandal.

MONICA.

And the weather.

ALESSANDRO.

Ah, we shall try to fix

Fresh bolts to our crossbows.

MONICA.

And we to back cuirass

With triple plates and rows of iron and brass.

[MONICA *and* LUCREZIA *go off*.

ALESSANDRO. You must forgive, my lord, the weary afternoon.

I see that you are bored.

MORTADELLO. No fault of yours ; the boon I lack is just the laugh of subtle, swarthy-skinned, Coarse-haired, black-eyed, thin, half a gypsy, half a wind Of the stubborn South—you know.

ALESSANDRO. You mean Zelina ?

MORTADELLO. Yes.

You knew her long ago. Nay, man, no shame. Confess.

ALESSANDRO. I'll do the penance first. Will you and she come dine

With music unrehearsed to match the mood o' the wine ?

MORTADELLO. Splendid.

ALESSANDRO. Then I've got a girl to dance to the guitar : She saw the sand-storms whirl down South—God knows how far—

And copies every twitch of their veiled fury of storm.

A witch—a very witch !

MORTADELLO. Most excellent.

ALESSANDRO. A form.

Pure as a sylph's, a soul like Satan's—pride and lust,

And something in the whole to humble to the dust

I care not who. She's force, pure elemental rage

Of love without remorse.

MORTADELLO. The wonder of the age !

Indeed and I must see the little lady soon.

ALESSANDRO. I'll send for her, trust me. To-morrow's the full moon

Will the day after suit your highness ? Then we'll dine
With but her light to shoot its silver through the wine.

MORTADELLO. Her light and love's ! My friend, I feared that
we should fight :

But—look toward the end ! fate sets us all to right.
Deserve as you've deserved till now, and you may be
The greatest man that's served in Venice after me.

ALESSANDRO. My lord, you are too good. At first I did not
know you.

But now I've understood the service we all owe you.

MORTADELLO. Well, shall we go to the boat ?

ALESSANDRO. At my lord's service, I.

MORTADELLO. We shall be fanned afloat.

ALESSANDRO. The gondola shall fly.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *A small room in the Palace. The furniture, principally three thrones, is all of ebony ; the hangings and curtains are of black. A small square table in the middle of the room holds four candles in iron candlesticks ; the candles themselves are of black wax. Two of the thrones are occupied by masked men ; the third is empty. Near the table stands ALESSANDRO, gorgeously dressed in white velvet, with a great crimson cloak. He is toying with his hat and rapier.*

ALESSANDRO. I am here, my lords. Disclose : why have you
summoned me ?

THE 1ST MASK. [*In the side throne.*] Where do you stand ?

ALESSANDRO. God knows.

1ST MASK. You stand before the Three.

ALESSANDRO. So I half guessed, but then, with all respect
to you,

I counted, gentlemen, and always stopped at two.

1ST MASK. Since Gabriele died the two have lacked a third.

ALESSANDRO. Well, I am satisfied : I wait the fatal word.

1ST MASK. What do you mean ?

ALESSANDRO. I find your words are coffin-nails.

You always bear in mind that dead men tell no tales.

So when you tell me tales, and fear no murmur lives,

You need not lift your veils.

2ND MASK. [*In the central throne.*] There are alternatives.

Young man, we'll parley first. You love the Doge's wife ?

ALESSANDRO. So that's the thunderburst ! I love her as my
life.

I need not say that she is cold and virtuous.

She scarce supposes me——

2ND MASK. You need not lie to us.

ALESSANDRO. Sir, I would lie to God.

1ST MASK. Quite right, quite right. The lad

Means well.

ALESSANDRO. I may be odd, but not devoutly bad.

2ND MASK. More than yourself's at stake. Listen, my friend ;
we know

For Monica's sweet sake how would you overthrow

The Doge ; we want to know what you propose instead.

ALESSANDRO. Firstly, I want——

2ND MASK. To go to Mortadello's bed.

That much your smile portends.

ALESSANDRO. Sir, you but brush my hem.

There's many a ray extends from one fair diadem.

I see this Doge a fool, a whoremaster, a sot,

Hot when he should be cool, cold when he should be hot.
Ambition kept him straight until the prize was won ;
Now he's a runagate, the scandal of the sun.

I'm a young spark, you guess, a fashionable rake—
But see me doff the dress when Venice is at stake !

1ST MASK. So the Princess must rule with you to help her, sir ?

ALESSANDRO. With you to guide the fool whose ways may
chance to err !

That was my scheme : if I divine your minds too ill,
I've only once to die ; gentlemen, what's your will ?

2ND MASK. Be seated sir.

ALESSANDRO. [*Bewildered a moment.*] I see no seat : ah,
but I do !

I claim equality and brotherhood with you.

[*He assumes the vacant throne.*]

1ST and 2ND MASK. We greet a colleague.

1ST MASK. Sit, develop us your plan.

Venice has need of it.

2ND MASK. And more need of a man !

ALESSANDRO. Nay, brothers, by your leave. The train but
needs the spark.

A day—the flash will cleave the horror of the dark.

Do me this honour ; dine with me to-morrow eve.

I promise you good wine, and shapely limbs to weave

Your dreams to more than dream. Besides, I promise this :

You shall know how extreme abject a thing he is.

And you may see, perhaps, a drama something apt

Of how in his own traps the hunter may be trapped.

1ST MASK. Well, we accept the gage. We have upheld him
well

Till now.

ALESSANDRO. An idle page in Venice chronicle !

2ND MASK. See to it, sir, that you with us, in changing
barque,

Accomplish and renew the glories of St. Mark !

ALESSANDRO. Ay ! 'tis the period when final fortune smiles.

By the great grace of God the City of the Isles

Under her angel's wings shall dare a thousand things—

A grace as great as God's, a face as fair as Spring's !

[The curtain falls.]

SCENE III. *The palace of COUNT ALESSANDRO. A chamber arrayed for dining, the table being curved like a horse-shoe. MORTADELLO on the right of the host, ZELINA on the right again, then THE FIRST MASK and a Venetian gentlewoman. On the left of the host THE SECOND MASK, then a gentlewoman, then LORENZO and another gentlewoman. It is after midnight. The guests are in various stages of intoxication, which ALESSANDRO and THE MASKS only simulate.*

ALESSANDRO. And thus the banquet ends.

MORTADELLO. The god is in the shrine.

ALESSANDRO. Prepare yourselves, my friends, no mercy on
the wine !

Ho there !

[Attendants appear, bringing great vases of silver.]

MORTADELLO. What flagons !

ALESSANDRO. Ay, Cellini's masterpiece.

1ST MASK. And these ?

ALESSANDRO. Dug recently from an old grave in Greece.

But that's the shell ; the truth lies darkling in the deep.

The very god of youth lies there—a sleep
 To riot in our veins, the very Bacchic dance,
 A carnival where reigns the tyranny of trance.

[The wine is poured.]

Come, to your feet, my friends, and pledge our Doge, the
 man

Whose wisdom comprehends God's everlasting plan,
 So that he duly ends what wonders He began.

[All rise and raise their cups, except MORTADELLO !]

ALL. Here's to the Doge, the Duke, the dog, the jolly
 fellow !

May Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John bless Mortadello !

*[MORTADELLO rises and bows to his host and fellow
 guests.]*

MORTADELLO. Good host, and loving friends, I cannot say
 how much

My wisdom comprehends ; but these are words that touch
 One's heart. Unbidden tears spring salty to mine eyes.

There's something that endears such common courtesies,
 When, as I see they are, the words are truly meant.

I am the highest star in all the firmament :

But this much I admit, my light is partly due—

Indeed, the most of it—to you, dear friends, to you.

I do not hesitate to say that, bar my wife.

This is the very proudest day in all my life.

[He raises his cup, and drinks.]

Here's health to you in turn ! Where is your dancing girl ?

You promised I should learn the nature of a pearl !

ALESSANDRO. Ho ! let the girls come in !

[THE MAJOR-DOMO goes out to obey.]

Ah. Doge her eyes are stars !

Divinely tall and thin, the strings of the guitars
Are not so slender as she, so tremulous and trim

LORENZO. Oh buxom girls for me !

Well, I prefer them slim !

[*To the lady beside him.*] Here's to your eyes, my dove !

[*All appear startled and shocked.*]

2ND MASK.

Take care, my lord, I hope

You will not allow love to make you slight the Pope !

1ST MASK. Then drink his Holiness, and get the business
done.

2ND MASK. A pretty sort of mess you have just missed, my
son !

LORENZO. Oh here's the good old Pope, long may he live
and reign !

And when he dies, I hope he may rise again.

[*All but MORTADELLO drink saying "The Pope."*]

2ND MASK. Easy, lad, easy. But, my lord, you do not drink !

MORTADELLO. It seems I'm bound to shut my mouth—but
may I think ?

1ST MASK. What do you mean ?

MORTADELLO. I mean—I will not tell you what.

Pass round the wine. God's teen ! Am I the Doge or not ?

Here's to the Pope ; I fear all is not right at Rome.

We have a legate here that he might need at home.

ALESSANDRO. I take your thought. A need at Rome for
more divines !

The legate—well, God speed him through the Apennines !

1ST MASK. But here the girls at last come swaying up the
stair.

And how their tresses cast faint fragrance on the air !

There enter MONICA, veiled, in a dancer's dress, and LUCREZIA, also veiled, with a guitar.

ALESSANDRO. True children of the East, their motion is the form

Of foray and of feast, of dusty devil-storm.

MORTADELLO. The Mass, what figures! Pass the wine!
Zelina, curl

Your lissom arm, my lass, around me.

LORENZO. See the girl

At the first twitterings of the gallant guitar
Sways like a palm and swings.

ALESSANDRO. Nay, trembles like a star!

MONICA. [*Sings to an Oriental dance.*] The moon is on the horizon ; the desert aches

To turn its face to silent space ; I see the snakes
And scorpions make orisons to neighbour Night,
Their holy hate envenom Fate, envenom Light,
Envenom all that cringe or call, that start or stir.

Love's holocaust is to exhaust who loveth her,
Exhaust of light, exhaust of might, exhaust of love,
Until their world of woe uncurled reach out above

To where the great black snake of Fate is coiled about
The very spine of God, a vine divine, devout.

Oh for the blind kiss of the wind, the desert air
Thrilling the blue and shrilling through my soul's despair!

Oh for the sharp edge of the escarpments of the dunes!
Diffract through haze the rigid rays of the dead moons!

Saturn of lead, and Mars all red, and Venus blue,
And purple Jove, lend me your love, as mine to you!

All stars, all vast worlds that stream past. I lust to slake

My passion's lime in love and crime ; I hiss, the snake
 Of the mad earth, I writhe in mirth, I fix my fangs
 In the red eye of the Most High, the orb that hangs
 So high, so fierce—my poisons pierce, my cold gray lips
 Climb, cling, and close, devour the rose in black eclipse.

MORTADELLO. Ah ! what a dance and what a song !

ALESSANDRO. These desert girls
 Show all their hideously hot hearts in the whirls
 That make us drunk.

MORTADELLO. Oh ! let us drink !

ZELINA. Pass round the wine !
 I have a fear, a fret.

MORTADELLO. O damnably divine !

MONICA. Will my lord taste the desert drug ? One grain's
 enough

For all unchaste perverse fantastic dreams of love.
 All the black bliss that crime contains, subtly obscene,
 Lurks in its kiss. O bowers of bronze ! O glades of
 green !

O Gods and Jinn that hide within the honied bead !

All pride and prize of all life lies within one seed.

Take it and wish ! I swear the word shall be fulfilled !

[She offers the hashish potion.]

MORTADELLO. Then this dog's life of man and wife—

1ST MASK. Oh, strife be stilled !

2ND MASK. My lord, consider.

MORTADELLO. What ? Who beards me, balks me ?

ALESSANDRO. I

Beseech your Highness.

MORTADELLO. Well !

MONICA. Oh let me prophesy !

I see the bond that clogs, the fetter link that galls,
Dissolved in the sharp drink—it rusts, and rots, and falls.

[MORTADELLO *drinks the hashish potion.*

MORTADELLO. Thanks girl ! Here, take this pearl !

MONICA. A pearl ! A pearl of price !

MORTADELLO. In my wife's ear it hung !

MONICA. O stately sacrifice !

This will make history. Now drink my lord, I'll show
By desert gramayre the thing that you would know.

[MORTADELLO *drinks again.*

Shut but your eyes : and where she is, and what she
does

Your very eyes, I swear, shall see.

MORTADELLO. Calamitous !

My brain turns.

MONICA. It shall clear. By Fatima's holy hand.

O Monica, appear ! I, it is I, command !

[*She drops the veil from her face.*

Stare, murderer, stare your eyes out ! Let them start
From your pale face, despair through all your dastard
heart.

Yes, I have won, I have won ! Black bastardy of fear !

My auguries are done, my vengeance drawing near

Is at your throat. I will be gone. 'Tis here ! 'Tis here !

[*She disappears.*

MORTADELLO. God ! God ! I'm poisoned. Stop the fiend !

Arrest her, friends !

All my wealth for a leech ! So Mortadello ends !

No ! Jesus ! up and out ! By God ! I'll kill her first,

Though all my blood is boiling and my bowels burst !

Give me my sword ! If I must go to hell, I swear

First I'll send the cursèd Legate there !
Come on !

*[He has seized his sword from an attendant, and
rushes out.]*

1ST MASK. We'll follow !

ALESSANDRO. Touch him not ; the play's half played.

2ND MASK. We are his shadows !

ALESSANDRO. Night shall fall.

[The men follow MORTADELLO at full speed]

ZELINA. *[Rising.]* We are betrayed.

Oh, but I'll save him yet ! I see the pretty plot.
I'll find a finer fantasy !

LUCREZIA. *[Rising and unveiling.]* No, you shall not !

Here, for the dagger-stroke you struck—this to your heart !
And this across your face for luck—and this for art !

[She stabs her thrice.]

ZELINA. O devil ! We have slept and waked and played
together.

LUCREZIA. And now my lust of you is slaked ! Now snaps
the tether.

Curst whore ! *[ZELINA dies.]*

Fair ladies, drink ! move hence at your own peril !
This night is trembling on the brink of stark and sterile
Dooms that roar loud ! O laugh ! O sing ! O dance ! I'll
play

Strike the guitar with this red steel ! Advance ! Array !
Array yourselves as brides ; these bloody robes are mine.
Blood on my breasts ! Storm rides at last the Apennine !
Bend yourselves ! Swing you with the blast ! The raging
revel

Bring all of us, yea, all, at last, to dare the devil !

Dance, damn your souls, dance, damn your souls ! Dance to
my star

That gains to-night the glowing goals of lust and war !

[*All dance, fearfully, while LUCREZIA plays wildly,
and dances upon the dead body of ZELINA.*]

SCENE IV. *Outside St. Mark's. Early morning.*

*Enter MORTADELLO wildly with drawn sword, ALESSANDRO,
LORENZO, and THE MASKS.*

MORTADELLO. God ! God ! the foam of stars ! the towers of
iron ! the stairs !

The crested comb of demon powers that flares and flares !

The devil take the toasured louse ! I'll trim his tail !

For God's sake get thee to thy house, unruly snail !

Why are those eyes so black and big ? That mouth so
sharp ?

I see the skies : they dance a jig to David's harp.

Boo ! Boo ! She's fled, the poisonous bitch, livid and
lean.

And when I wed the crazy witch, God came between.

Oh ! there are miles between her skin and my good sword !

Seal up her smiles, and thrust it in her bosom, Lord !

White cursed moons ! bewitch, betray you shall no more :

My spirit swoons with lust to slay the spatulous whore.

[*THE LEGATE, attended, comes out of the church.*]

Pss ! Pss ! here comes the snake, the black sly snake of
Rome !

Once let my thumbs sink in his neck ! O damned dome

Of devils burst ! Let through my steel ! By God, let go !
I'll kill him first ! The raging wheel of snakes and snow !

[He attacks THE LEGATE, whose attendants flee in fear. THE LEGATE falls.]

THE LEGATE. Jesu have mercy on my soul ! I'm a dead man !

MORTADELLO. I'll scalp thy cursèd shaven poll, proud
pelican !

MONICA. *[Rushing out of the church.]* What ! will you see this
madman take the Legate's life ?

Cowards ! I'll face him first, although I am his wife.

[She snatches a sword from a bystander and interposes.]

I am the Pope's ! I am the Pope's ! For God and Christ !

Now, Mortadello, we cross swords ! . . . One stroke sufficed.

[Putting her foot on the neck of MORTADELLO, and both hands to the hilt of the sword, she draws it from his throat. All stand aghast.]

Gentlemen, to your palaces ! This carrion

Be guarded and displayed. At noon the bell toll on,

And bring the worthiest citizens and noblemen

Into the throne-room. I will speak my purpose then.

Father, I pray you absolution.

THE LEGATE.

Daughter ! You

Have saved my life. God——

[He falls back fainting into the arms of his chaplain.]

MONICA.

Ah ! mirabile dictu !

Summon the people hither now by tuck of drum.

Count Alessandro, I command attendance. Come.

[She moves away, followed by COUNT ALESSANDRO, amid the silent salutes of all present, THE LEGATE gathering his forces to raise his fingers in blessing.]

SCENE V. *The Palace of the Doge. The Throne-room.*

MONICA—ALESSANDRO—LUCREZIA. *A distant bell, the Great Bell of St. Mark's, still tolls.*

MONICA. Embrace me ! Here we stand at the cross-roads of Fate.

Enlace me ! hand in, hand what ardours we await !
The merry play is played, the comedy that Pan
On very Ida made, the comedy of man !

LUCREZIA. I gave her steel to twist and writhe herself upon.

MONICA. One flicker of my wrist, and his black soul was gone.

ALESSANDRO. I have done nothing yet.

MONICA. Oh, you have laughed ! The key.
The secret coronet of all the comedy !

ALESSANDRO. Yes : it is only now when I am sure we win,
Wreathing each beaming brow with the reward of sin,
That in my heart there seems the echo of a sigh.
Delight dissolves the dreams desire had set on high !

MONICA. Oh, we shall find fresh food. True wit is never stale.

Trust me, my merry mood.

LUCREZIA. Provided we prevail.

Can Venice be deceived ?

ALESSANDRO. Could all the angel choirs

Make any truth believed ?

MONICA. Man thinks as he desires.

And all men being blind and deaf—

ALESSANDRO. It follows then

That women will not find much trouble from the men.

LUCREZIA. Here come the Legate now—see if he hesitate !

MONICA. Dear Sandro, smooth your brow ! These are affairs of State !
[ALESSANDRO *composes his laughter.*]

THE LEGATE *enters, followed by many nobles and burgesses.*

Most welcome, holy father ! You were not hurt at all ?

LEGATE. Not hurt, but shaken rather. Mine are old bones to fall.

MONICA. Welcome my lords ! You, too, are welcome citizens !

All your attention due to hear his eminence

Speak for his Holiness the Pope.

LEGATE My friends, I came

Charged with all strain and stress to watch a glamoured game.

I watched. I waited. Not one word have I let fall.

It was enough to allot your portions to you all.

One I found faithful, one ; your devilish Doge's wife,

The saint and Amazon to-day that saved my life.

The wind to stir your leaves, the star to crown your foam :

Saint Monica receives the full support of Rome !

2ND MASK. [*Showing a parchment.*] Most secret in the State, the Three have stood apart,

Ruling the pulse and rate of all the civic heart.

For them I speak : they vow to place the Ducal Cap

On the Princess's brow, the sceptre in her lap.

LORENZO. [*Showing a parchment.*] And let me say the same,
good lords my countrymen,

On their behalf who claim to sit among the Ten.

PRINCE JULIO. The nobles are agreed : long live the fair
Princess !

Her reign shall be the seed and flower of our success !

A CITIZEN. We have seen troublous times : at last good
fortune smiles !

Here's glory to the Angel of the City of the Isles !

[MONICA *assumes throne ; all applaud and do
homage, MONICA comes forward and kneels be-
fore* THE LEGATE.

MONICA. Now glory be to God, and glory to His Son,

And glory to His Spirit, the eternal Three in One !

I humbly kneel and swear all truth and faith to keep,

All power of all my prayer, all vigil to your sleep !

[COUNT ALESSANDRO *joins MONICA, kneeling*

My good lord here shall guide, his wit and wisdom serve,

Should Monica his bride stumble or slip or swerve.

[LUCREZIA *joins MONICA, kneeling.*

My lady here shall melt my heart, if toil and power

Harden what once it felt, make snow of summer shower.

I don the Ducal Cap, I grasp the Orb and Rod ;

Ere pride beget mishap, lords, leave me here with God !

THE CITIZENS. Here's truth and modesty for blustering and
wiles :

Oh glory to the Angel of the City of the Isles !

LEGATE. Let us go forth, my friends : a higher power than
ours

On her affect attends, her dominance endowers.

See, in her face 'tis Christ himself that weeps and smiles !

ALL. All glory to the Angel of the City of the Isles !

*[All go out quietly, except ALESSANDRO and LUCREZIA,
who remain with MONICA, kneeling in prayer.
As they are left alone, MONICA extends her arms
and crushes their mouths against her face.]*

CURTAIN.

A NOTE ON THE ALEXANDRINE

DUE to the harmonious genius of ever-glorious Queen Alexandra as (every schoolboy knows it) the Alexandrine is, it may seem mere impertinence on my part to write in that measure, and worse to introduce innovations. This I cannot help.

The Classical Alexandrine was really two lines of six syllables, for the caesure was supposed to fall invariably at the end of the third foot. Victor Hugo claimed to have destroyed *ce grand niasis d'Alexandria*, but he never did much good.

Verlaine appears to have been the first who really appreciated the possibilities of the measure. In England nobody has hitherto attempted it except Browning, who never suspected that music could enter into aught but short lyrics.

1. The Classical:

Ay, to this end, indeed was marriage first or *dained*,
And to this end to-day is by the Church *sustained*.

2. Idem, marked by a rime :

Listen ; in all good *faith*, I gladly grant you *much*,
Not prone to scoff, and *scathe* the scutcheon with a *smutch*.

3. After the second foot :

Oh ! but you're *hurt* !

Young man ! she must be tended.

Well.

No ! take my *shirt* ! Staunch the dear breast.

A miracle.

4. After the fourth foot :

Serene, august, untroubled, *cold*, her prayers are *worth*
More than our steel, more than our *gold*, that bind the *earth*.

5. After both second and fourth feet :

Come, let me *hold* my crystal *cross* up to the *moon* !
A guess of *gold* were at a loss to tell its *tune*.

6. After the first foot :

Bow *down* to the cross ! His love purge thee : His Passion save
thee !

Christ *crown* the work ! Here is the blessing that he *gave thee* !

7. After the first and fifth feet :

No *news* ! No word of Mortadello's *fate* ! No hope.
To *bruise* the head of the old snake, the *State*. No *scope*

8. After the first half foot and the second foot :

Come, save me, *save* thy maiden ! Strike each barbèd *dart*
Home to the *grave* convent and cloister of my *heart*,

9. After the fifth foot :

Last, to the lords who by their *attitude* *applaud*
This day of burial to faction, *feud*, and *fraud*.

10. After the second and fourth feet, but with each line rimed within itself :

Oh for the *blind* kiss of the *wind*, the desert *air*
Thrilling the *blue* and shrilling *through* my soul's *despair*.

(“ Thrilling ” and “ shrilling ” are here thrown in without extra charge. This device frequently recurs.)

There may be one or two other complications which I have overlooked.

I have made use of the usual liberties in the matter of using anapæsts and trochees for iambics. With regard to double rimes, I have sometimes treated them as single rimes, when they occur in the middle of a line ; sometimes I have made the line of thirteen syllables to suit them.

I have even, once or twice, used the reverse method of calling a pause a half foot. “ Stare, murderer, stare,” counts as six syllables.

All this has been done of high purpose ; there is some inflection or emphasis to be gained, or some tone to be given to the speech by the irregularity.

But there is sure to be a serious quarrel about the caesura. This does not always follow the fall of the rime. I have even rimed with the middle of a word :

Hell surges ; *all* its demons yell with triumph : fell
Swell their *appalling* choirs the unutterable spell.

Even some of the plain Alexandrines have no proper caesura :

Mischief, I gather, Mistress Mary Magdalene !

Here there is no possible beat.

I have done this in order to indicate to the actors who will play this comedy if ever there is an English speaking stage

in a free and enlightened country that these verses are to be spoken with the natural emphasis and accent. If they fail in this, the variety that I have purposely introduced into the measure with musical intent will be lost, and the play will be no longer human speech.

If everything be spoken as if it were prose, then the repeated rimes at the short intervals will make speech, as it were, chime.

But if people try to fit the speech to the rime, all is lost.

Well, God forgive sin !

ALEISTER CROWLEY.

