

Enter LUDWIG.

LUDWIG. Now for my confession and full pardon. They told me the Grand Duke was dancing duets in the Market Place, but I don't see him. (*Sees RUDOLPH.*) Hallo! Who's this? (*Aside.*) Why, it is the Grand Duke!

RUDOLPH (*sobbing*). Who are you, sir, who presume to address me in person? If you've anything to communicate, you must fling yourself at the feet of my Acting Temporary Sub-Deputy Assistant Vice-Chamberlain, who will fling himself at the feet of his immediate superior, and so on, with successive foot-flings through the various grades—your communication will, in course of time, come to my august knowledge.

LUDWIG. But when I inform your Highness that in me you see the most unhappy, the most unfortunate, the most completely miserable man in your whole dominion—

RUDOLPH (*still sobbing*). You the most miserable man in my whole dominion? How can you have the face to stand there and say such a thing? Why, look at me! Look at me! (*Bursts into tears.*)

LUDWIG. Well, I wouldn't be a cry-baby.

RUDOLPH. A cry-baby? If you had just been told that you were going to be deposed tomorrow, and perhaps blown up with dynamite for all I know, wouldn't you be a cry-baby? I do declare if I could only hit upon some cheap and painless method of putting an end to an existence which has become insupportable, I would unhesitatingly adopt it!

LUDWIG. You would? (*Aside.*) I see a magnificent way out of this! By Jupiter, I'll try it! (*ALOUD.*) Are you, by any chance, in earnest?

RUDOLPH. In earnest? Why, look at me!

LUDWIG. If you are really in earnest—if you really desire to escape scot free from this impending—this unspeakably horrible catastrophe—without trouble, danger, pain, or expense—why not resort to a Statutory Duel?

RUDOLPH. A Statutory Duel?

LUDWIG. Yes. The Act is still in force, but it will expire to-morrow afternoon. You fight—you lose—you are dead for a day. To-morrow, when the Act expires, you will come to life again and resume your Grand Duchy as though nothing had happened. In the meantime, the explosion will have taken place and the survivor will have had to bear the brunt of it.

RUDOLPH. Yes, that's all very well, but who'll be fool enough to *be* the survivor?

LUDWIG (*kneeling*). Actuated by an overwhelming sense of attachment to your Grand Ducal person, I unhesitatingly offer myself as the victim of your subjects' fury.

RUDOLPH. You do? Well, really that's very handsome. I daresay being blown up is not nearly as unpleasant as one would think.

LUDWIG. Oh, yes it is. It mixes one up, awfully!

RUDOLPH. But suppose I were to lose?*

LUDWIG. Oh, that's easily arranged. (*Producing cards.*) I'll put an Ace up my sleeve—you'll put a King up yours. When the drawing takes place, I shall seem to draw the higher card and you the lower. And there you are!

RUDOLPH. Oh, but that's cheating.

LUDWIG. So it is. I never thought of that. (*Going.*)

RUDOLPH (*hastily*). Not that I mind. But I say—you won't take an unfair advantage of your day of office? You won't go tipping people, or squandering my little savings in fireworks, or any nonsense of that sort?

LUDWIG. I am hurt—really hurt—by the suggestion.

RUDOLPH. You—you wouldn't like to put down a deposit, perhaps?

LUDWIG. No. I don't think I should like to put down a deposit.

RUDOLPH. Or give a guarantee?

LUDWIG. A guarantee would be equally open to objection.

RUDOLPH. It would be more regular. Very well, I suppose you must have your own way.

LUDWIG. Good. I say—we must have a devil of a quarrel!

RUDOLPH. Oh, a devil of a quarrel!

LUDWIG. Just to give colour to the thing. Shall I give you a sound thrashing before all the people? Say the word—it's no trouble.

RUDOLPH. No, I think not, though it would be very convincing and it's extremely good and thoughtful of you to suggest it. Still, a devil of a quarrel!

LUDWIG. Oh, a devil of a quarrel!

RUDOLPH. No half measures. Big words—strong language—rude remarks. Oh, a devil of a quarrel!

LUDWIG. Now, the question is, how shall we summon the people?

RUDOLPH. Oh, there's no difficulty about that. Bless your heart, they've been staring at us through those windows for the last half hour!

* Gilbert seems to have slipped here. Rudolph *wants* to lose. The line should either be "But suppose you were to lose?" or "But suppose I were to win?"

LUDWIG

259

JULIA. And now that everybody has gone, and we're happily and comfortably married, I want to have a few words with my new-born husband.

LUDWIG (*aside*). Yes, I expect you'll often have a few words with your new-born husband!
(*Aloud*.) Well, what is it?

JULIA. Why, I've been thinking that as you and I have to play our parts for life, it is most essential that we should come to a definite understanding as to how they shall be rendered. Now, I've been considering how I can make the most of the Grand Duchess.

LUDWIG. Have you? Well, if you'll take my advice, you'll make a very fine part of it.

JULIA. Why, that's quite *my* idea.

LUDWIG. I shouldn't make it one of your hoity-toity vixenish viragoes.

JULIA. You think not?

LUDWIG. Oh, I'm quite clear about that. I should make her a tender, gentle, submissive, affectionate (but not too affectionate) child-wife—timidly anxious to coil herself into her husband's heart, but kept in check by an awestruck reverence for his exalted intellectual qualities and his majestic personal appearance.

JULIA. Oh, that is your idea of a good part?

LUDWIG. Yes—a wife who regards her husband's slightest wish as an inflexible law, and who ventures but rarely into his august presence, unless (which would happen seldom) he should summon her to appear before him. A crushed, despairing violet, whose blighted existence would culminate (all too soon) in a lonely and pathetic death-scene! A fine part, my dear.

JULIA. Yes. There's a good deal to be said for your view of it. Now there are some actresses whom it would fit like a glove.

LUDWIG (*aside*). I wish I'd married one of 'em!

JULIA. But, you see, I *must* consider my temperament. For instance, my temperament would demand some strong scenes of justifiable jealousy.

LUDWIG. Oh, there's no difficulty about that. You shall have *them*.

JULIA. With a lovely but detested rival—

LUDWIG. Oh, *I'll* provide the rival.

JULIA. Whom I should stab—stab—stab!

LUDWIG. Oh, I wouldn't stab her. It's been done to death. I should treat her with a silent and contemptuous disdain, and delicately withdraw from a position which, to one of your sensitive nature, would be absolutely untenable. Dear me, I can see you delicately withdrawing, up centre and off!

JULIA. *Can* you?

LUDWIG. Yes. It's a fine situation—and in your hands, full of quiet pathos!