

RUDOLF

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RUDOLPH. I don't feel at all comfortable. I hope I'm not doing a foolish thing in getting married. After all, it's a poor heart that never rejoices, and this wedding of mine is the first little treat I've allowed myself since my christening. Besides, Caroline's income is very considerable, and as her ideas of economy are quite on a par with mine, it ought to turn out well. Bless her tough old heart, she's a mean little darling! Oh, here she is, punctual to her appointment!

Enter BARONESS VON KRAKENFELDT.

BARONESS. Rudolph! Why, what's the matter?

RUDOLPH. Why, I'm not quite myself, my pet. I'm a little worried and upset. I want a tonic. It's the low diet, I think. I am afraid, after all, I shall have to take the bull by the horns and have an egg with my breakfast.

BARONESS. I shouldn't do anything rash, dear. Begin with a jujube. (*Gives him one.*)

RUDOLPH (*about to eat it, but changes his mind*). I'll keep it for supper. (*He sits by her and tries to put his arm round her waist.*)

BARONESS. Rudolph, don't! What in the world are you thinking of?

RUDOLPH. I was thinking of embracing you, my sugarplum. Just as a little cheap treat.

BARONESS. What, here? In public? Really you appear to have no sense of delicacy.

RUDOLPH. No sense of delicacy, Bon-bon!

BARONESS. No. I can't make you out. When you courted me, all your courting was done publicly in the Market Place. When you proposed to me, you proposed in the Market Place. And now that we're engaged you seem to desire that our first *tête-à-tête* shall occur in the Market Place! Surely you've a room in your Palace—with blinds—that would do?

RUDOLPH. But, my own, I can't help myself. I'm bound by my own decree.

BARONESS. Your own decree?

RUDOLPH. Yes. You see, all the houses that give on the Market Place belong to me, but the drains (which date back to the reign of Charlemagne) want attending to, and the houses wouldn't let—so, with a view of increasing the value of the property, I decreed that all love-episodes between affectionate couples should take place, in public, on this spot, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, when the band doesn't play.

BARONESS. Bless me, what a happy idea! So moral too! And have you found it answer?

RUDOLPH. Answer? The rents have gone up fifty per cent, and the sale of opera glasses (which is a Grand Ducal monopoly) has received an extraordinary stimulus! So, under the circumstances, *would* you allow me to put my arm round your waist? As a source of income! Just once!

BARONESS. But it's so very embarrassing. Think of the opera glasses!

RUDOLPH. My good girl, that's just what I *am* thinking of. Hang it all, we must give them *something* for their money! What's that?

BARONESS (*unfolding paper, which contains a large letter, which she hands to him*). It's a letter which your detective asked me to hand to you. I wrapped it up in yesterday's paper to keep it clean.

RUDOLPH. Oh, it's only his report! That'll keep. But, I say, you've never been and bought a newspaper?

BARONESS. My dear Rudolph, do you think I'm mad? It came wrapped round my breakfast.

RUDOLPH (*relieved*). I thought you were not the sort of girl to go and buy a newspaper! Well, as we've got it, we may as well read it. What does it say?

BARONESS. Why—dear me—here's your biography! "Our Detested Despot!"

RUDOLPH. Yes—I fancy that refers to me.

BARONESS. And it says—Oh, it can't be!

RUDOLPH. What can't be?

BARONESS. Why, it says that although you're going to marry me to-morrow, you were betrothed in infancy to the Princess of Monte Carlo!

RUDOLPH. Oh yes—that's quite right. Didn't I mention it?

BARONESS. Mention it! You never said a word about it!

RUDOLPH. Well, it doesn't matter, because, you see, it's practically off.

BARONESS. Practically off?

RUDOLPH. Yes. By the terms of the contract the betrothal is void unless the Princess marries before she is of age. Now, her father, the Prince, is stony-broke, and hasn't left his house for years for fear of arrest. Over and over again he has implored me to come to him to be married—but in vain. Over and over again he has implored me to advance him the money to enable the Princess to come to me—but in vain. I am very young, but not as young as that; and as the Princess comes of age at two to-morrow, why at two to-morrow I'm a free man, so I appointed that hour for our wedding, as I shall like to have as much marriage as I can get for my money.

BARONESS. I see. Of course, if the married state is a happy state, it's a pity to waste any of it.

RUDOLPH. Why, every hour we delayed I should lose a lot of you and you'd lose a lot of me!

BARONESS. My thoughtful darling! Oh, Rudolph, we ought to be very happy!

RUDOLPH. If I'm not, it'll be my first bad investment. Still there *is* such a thing as a slump even in Matrimonials.

BARONESS. I often picture us in the long, cold, dark December evenings, sitting close to each other and singing impassioned duets to keep us warm, and thinking of all the lovely things we could afford to buy if we chose, and, at the same time, planning out our lives in a spirit of the most rigid and exacting economy!

RUDOLPH. It's a most beautiful and touching picture of connubial bliss in its highest and most rarefied development!

Rudolf

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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 to-morrow, 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!