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THE
SECRET AGENT.

A Comedy,

(PARTLY FROM THE GERMAN)

IN TWO ACTS,

BY

J. STIRLING COYNE,

AUTHOR OF

"Box and Cox Married and Settled," "My Wife's Daughter," "Binks the Bag-man," "How to Settle Accounts with Your Laundress," "Did you ever send your Wife to Camberwell," "A Duel in the Dark," "Leo the Terrible," "Mrs. Bunbury's Spoons," "The Water Witches," "An Unprotected Female," "The Pas des Fascination," "The Hope of the Family," "Willikind and his Dinah," "The Old Chateau," &c. &c.

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WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

909540

THE SECRET AGENT.

First performed at the Theatre Royal Haymarket,
Monday, March 10, 1855.

Characters.

DUKE VICTOR.....	MR. HOWE.
COUNT STEINHAUSEN (<i>the Duke's Prime Minister</i>).....	MR. BUCKSTONE.
BARON STANDBACH (<i>the Grand Chamberlain</i>)	MR. COMPTON.
COUNT OSCAR.....	MR. W. FARREN.
ROBERT (<i>the Duke's Valet</i>).....	MR. COE.
THE DOWAGER DUCHESS	MRS. POYNTER.
ERNESTINE (<i>the Duchess's Niece</i>).....	MRS. CAROLINE WHITE.
NETTCHEN (<i>Robert's Wife</i>)	MISS E. CHAPLIN.

ACT I.

APARTMENT IN THE DUCAL PALACE,
WITH TERRACE AND GARDENS.—(Callcott).

ACT II.

Illuminated Saloon in the Palace,
AND MASKED FÊTE.—(Morris and O'Connor).

Costumes.—Period 1810.

DUKE VICTOR.—*First Dress*: Green hunting dress. *Second Dress*: Purple velvet embroidered coat, satin waistcoat and breeches, crimson order ribbon, hat trimmed with feathers, shoes, buckles, and sword; domino and black mask.

COUNT STEINHAUSEN.—*First Dress*: Puce embroidered coat, white waistcoat, black satin breeches, crimson order ribbon, shoes and buckles, chapeau trimmed with feathers, sword. *Second Dress*: Complete costume of a Spanish Dancer, short petticoat with many flounces, velvet body, white veil, high comb, fan, &c.

BARON STANDBACH.—*First Dress*: Embroidered court suit, blue order ribbon. *Second Dress*: Mephistopheles.

COUNT OSCAR.—Embroidered suit.

ROBERT.—Black coat and breeches, and white waistcoat.

COURTIERS.—Court suits.

CAPTAIN.—Blue military coat, white waistcoat and breeches, high boots.

SOLDIERS.—Military coat—gaiters.

DUCHESS.—*First Dress*: Green satin trimmed with blue velvet. *Second Dress*: Blue satin and gold.

ERNESTINE.—*First Dress*: Pink silk. *Second Dress*: White and silver trimmed with crape satin.

NETTCHEN.—Red petticoat, and blue velvet jacket trimmed with blue and gold.

MASQUERADERS.—Various fancy dresses.

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THE
S E C R E T A G E N T.



ACT I.

SCENE I.— *A Saloon in the Palace of Duke Victor, elegantly furnished. A large door at back and windows, R. and L. flat, looking on a terrace, beyond which are seen the Gardens of the Palace adorned with fountains. Doors, R. and L.; table with papers and writing materials, L.; chess table, R.; sofa, R. 2 E.*

Enter COUNT STEINHAUSEN and BARON VON STANDBACH, c., in conversation.

COUNT. (L. c.) Impossible, Baron.

BARON. (R. c.) Do you question the accuracy of my information, Count? How do you imagine I could have held my post of Grand Chamberlain so long, if I had not my spies everywhere? I see everything; figuratively speaking, I am all eyes.

COUNT. And absolutely, all ears.

BARON. Be assured then, that what I tell you is true. His Highness the Duke is about to make a daring effort at popularity.

COUNT. You alarm me; what can he want with popularity, when I, Count Steinhausen, his prime minister, have never wanted it? You know, Baron, I am not popular?

BARON. Very much the reverse, Count.

COUNT. Then you know the Duke is a mere puppet in the hands of his mother, the Duchess—who, on the death of the late Duke, sixteen years ago, assumed the reins of power.

BARON. And has held them ever since, like a Semiramis. She'll never resign them unwillingly.

COUNT. Human nature, Baron, human nature. You would not feel overjoyed, I dare say, if that rod of office which adds dignity to your natural grace, were transferred to other hands.

BARON. Spare the rod! they might take my life first.

COUNT. Ah, Baron, I can sympathise with your feelings. But are you certain that the Duke intends throwing open the palace gardens to the public?

BARON. Positive; and more, he has given orders that the band of his body guards shall play in the gardens, three evenings in the week.

COUNT. Those gardens—that band, devoted till now to royalty! Go on, Baron.

BARON. On which evenings he intends to mingle among his people.

COUNT. A Duke mingling with his people,—shouldering the canaille;—my head swims:—but go on.

BARON. His Highness says it is but right and reasonable to afford the people so innocent a recreation.

COUNT. Did any of the Duke's illustrious progenitors ever dream of innocent recreation for the people? Haven't they all the recreation they require? Don't they drink beer and smoke tobacco, when they can pay for them? May they not indulge in the luxury of beating their wives, for almost nothing? Don't they enjoy the public whippings every Monday in the Grand Square? Haven't they all the innocent recreations that nature intended for them?

BARON. The Duke don't think so.

COUNT. Dukes should never think;—if they begin to think, what is to become of their ministers? What does the Duchess say to this dangerous innovation?

BARON. She says nothing; in fact, I have not ventured to tell her yet. You know her temper when she's roused—is—rather warm—so I thought—

COUNT. Hem!—the Duke!

Enter the DUKE, c., he is dressed in a sporting habit and carries a fowling piece. Two YAGERS follow him, and wait at entrance, back.

DUKE. (c.) Take my gun.

(one of the YAGERS takes his gun, and both exeunt at back—the COUNT and BARON approach, bowing)

Ah, Count Steinhausen—good morning, Baron. (both bow)

COUNT. Your Highness has been shooting, this morning.

DUKE. Yes; I could think of no other amusement, so I went into the preserves and brought down some thirty or forty brace of birds.

BARON. Splendid execution!

COUNT. Your Highness is fond of field sports?

DUKE. Passionately—when like the mountain hunter I can track my game, by lake, and dell, and forest:—there is something to make a man's pulse beat and cheek glow in such sport; but this—this massacre of unsuspecting pheasants disgusts and wearies me. (flings away his hat and sits R. of table, l. c.)

COUNT. Your Highness might like to vary the morning's amusement by a little business. (producing papers) These papers—(stands l. of table)

DUKE. Papers! What am I to do with them?

COUNT. Merely to affix your sign manual to them. (the DUKE unfolds one of the papers) Your Highness need not fatigue yourself examining them, they have been already approved by the Duchess, your mother.

DUKE. My mother is exceedingly kind—she knows that I have no experience in matters of state, and she considerably relieves me of all the duties of my position. Where's the pen?

COUNT. Here, your Highness. (gives DUKE a pen)

DUKE. Does La Fiorella sing at the opera to-night, Baron?

BARON, (c.) Decidedly, your Highness,

DUKE. What an angelic voice she has, that Fiorella—so rich—so pure—so tender; and—I sign here, Count. ?

COUNT. Where your Highness' finger is.

DUKE. (*signing*) Such wonderful facility of execution. (*the Count places another paper before him*) But what surprises me most is the perfect unconsciousness she displays of her own power. (*signs the paper*)

COUNT. Wonderful unconsciousness of power, your Highness. (*places another document before him*)

DUKE. What do you think of that shake of hers on the upper B flat?

COUNT. Well, your Highness, if I am to express my candid opinion of her B flat——

Enter the PRINCESS ERNESTINE, c. from L.—down, c.

DUKE. (*rising*) Ah, my fair cousin, your presence comes here like a gleam of sunshine to a poor prisoner.

ERNEST. I fear I interrupt your Highness—you are engaged?

DUKE. Matters of no moment—public business—there's no hurry about it; I am wholly at your disposal this morning. What shall we do? Ride, walk, or play at chess? Shall we play out the game we left unfinished last evening, see, here are the board and pieces still undisturbed?

ERNEST. With all my heart! (*the DUKE places a chair for ERNESTINE, r. of chess table, and sits opposite to her to play*)

DUKE. You can leave the papers, Count, I will sign them by-and-bye. (*COUNT and BARON bow and retire, L.*)

COUNT. (*aside to BARON*) Pleasure before business. We are safe, Baron, while we can amuse him.

Exeunt COUNT and BARON, L.

ERNEST. Remember our wager, Duke, a dozen pairs of gloves on the game.

DUKE. With a condition that should I win, the gloves are to be commuted for kisses.

ERNEST. Mind your play then, or I shall beat you.

DUKE. So you really think yourself a match for a Duke?

ERNEST. For a king if he dare challenge me.

DUKE. Ha, ha, ha! A bold girl. There—I take your knight. (*plays*)

ERNEST. My poor knight! He fell though as a loyal knight should—in defence of his Queen. (*plays*)

DUKE. Humph! I don't understand your play.

ERNEST. It is simple enough. See. (*plays*) Check to your king.

DUKE. Treason! How has it happened? The king has got into a corner behind the Queen and has not a single move.

ERNEST. An awkward position for a sovereign, but it sometimes happens so in the real game played at Court.

DUKE. Your words have a meaning I would penetrate. (*DUKE rises, then ERNESTINE*) Ernestine, speak truly to me as you once used, fourteen years ago, when we were children together. There

were no secrets between us. Why, my dear cousin, should there be any now? (*takes her hand—comes down*)

ERNEST. I—I don't know—perhaps I am venturing on ground that I should avoid; but I will hazard your displeasure, and tell you that the people begin to murmur at your inactivity.

DUKE. My inactivity! Why, I am up at six o'clock every morning—I walk, ride, and fence—

ERNEST. I mean your political inertness—your neglect of the affairs of government.

DUKE. Oh, I leave them to the Duchess and my ministers; they understand these matters—I don't.

ERNEST. It is to you, though, that your subjects look to redress the abuses which have crept into the state during your minority.

DUKE. Abuses! I never heard of any.

ERNEST. No! Your ears would be the last they would reach, if you had not a chattering little cousin, who holds your honor dear as her own, and will suffer no tongue to impeach it.

DUKE. What would you have me do? I have already, as you suggested, given orders that the palace gardens shall be thrown open to the public.

ERNEST. Bravo! If you go on thus, you may hope to be Duke before you die—ha, ha, ha!

DUKE. You laugh at me.

ERNEST. I only do what all the world does.

DUKE. I am glad I afford the world so much merriment.

ERNEST. You told me to speak freely to you—I will do so, and from my lips you shall hear the truth.

DUKE. Those sweet lips would turn the bitterest truths to honey.

ERNEST. A truce to compliments. If you are a puppet in the hands of the Duchess and her ministers—if you are but the shadow of authority, where you should be the substance—the fault is your own; for you took the crown as a plaything, and you wear it as a plaything.

DUKE. You certainly don't deal in flattery, cousin.

ERNEST. On your return from your travels, you found your mother in power, and your ministers subservient to her in all things; but too careless, or too studious of your own ease, you forbore to assert your reign over your own people, and permitted things to go in their old track.

DUKE. Could I do otherwise? My mother, who had directed the government during my minority, could not bear to hear of any change—you perceive how feeble she has become.

ERNEST. Yes, her constitution appears to be completely broken down whenever you show a disposition to act independently of her control; at other times my respected aunt possesses strength and nerve enough to lead a troop of dragoons into the field.

DUKE. But my ministers, whom I have been taught to look up to as wise and faithful advisers—men whose love for their country—

ERNEST. Is only exceeded by their affection for themselves. (*goes to table, l. c., and takes the papers which the BARON has left*) Shall I

prove it? (*down, l.*) Look at this paper which, I perceive, you have just signed. (*gives him one of the papers*)

DUKE. (*starts as he glances at it*) What's this? A patent bestowing a valuable monopoly upon Count Blamberg.

ERNEST. A nephew of your prime minister. (*gives him another paper*)

DUKE. And this. (*glances at the paper*) A grant of the estates and seigneuries of Walsdorf to Otto von Gorgas.

ERNEST. The son-in-law of your grand chamberlain. (*gives him another paper*)

DUKE. And this—(*glances at paper*) An additional tax upon salt.

ERNEST. For which you will have to bear the odium. (*gives him the last paper*)

DUKE. (*looking at the paper*) A decree of banishment against Captain von Gersternberg—my old friend—

ERNEST. Who was indiscreet enough to say in a public billiard room that you were Duke regnant, but the Duchess was Duke dominant.

DUKE. Severe, but, I fear, too true. (*puts the papers into his pocket*)

ERNEST. This is not all though. From the contents of a letter that the Duchess left accidentally open the other morning on her dressing table, I discovered that—that—

DUKE. Why do you hesitate? Is it something very terrible?

ERNEST. Oh, very! I mean—not terrible, but surprising: it is—that secret negotiations are now going forward for your marriage with the Princess Amelia of Brunswick.

DUKE. For my marriage! This is intolerable: they would make a cipher of me in my own Court; but I'll go this moment, summon a council, and show them that I will be master in my own dominions. Marry me by a diplomatic trick! I'm glad I have detected them, for now I shall break the meshes in which I have been too long held by my friends. (*going*)

ERNEST. Stay! Your present impetuosity is more dangerous than your former indifference. What is it you propose to do?

DUKE. To form immediately a new ministry of younger and honester men.

ERNEST. Younger you may get, but for honester—they will still be ministers.

DUKE. Oh, that I had but one true friend who would stand by me firmly and decidedly in this struggle.

ERNEST. Such a friend may be found: one who shall be entirely devoted to you, impenetrable to corruption, and known only to yourself.

DUKE. Where is such a treasure to be had?

ERNEST. So close at hand that I see him now before me.

DUKE. (*looking round*) Where?

ERNEST. In the Duke's own person.

DUKE. You speak enigmas.

ERNEST. I will be explicit then. You must announce to the Duchess and your ministers that a friend in whom you have unbounded

confidence is coming to Court, and that he is to act as your private counsellor.

DUKE. Mine?

ERNEST. Yes; but for reasons you need not state, it is your pleasure that he shall not be seen by any one.

DUKE. An invisible confidant! If I understand you, I'm to be a secret agent to myself.

ERNEST. That is exactly what I mean.

DUKE. I like the idea! The mere belief in the existence of such a being will spread dismay amongst the enemy. I will immediately undertake the character.

ERNEST. Be firm, then, and we must be successful. As we may require an auxiliary for our plan, I have thought of Nettchen, the wife of your valet Robert, who was formerly my maid—I can trust my life to her fidelity and her wit.

DUKE. There is no time to be lost then, for I hear the Duchess and the ministers returning from the council.

ERNESTINE exits by the terrace, c. l.

Enter the DUCHESS, l., attended by the COUNT STEINHAUSEN, BARON STANDBACH, COUNT OSCAR, and LADIES and GENTLEMEN of the Court.

DUCH. (c., to DUKE) Good morning, Victor. (*the DUKE kisses her hand*) I missed you at my reception last evening—was it that you were more agreeably engaged?

DUKE. (r. c.) No, faith, madam, I was seriously employed reading Machiavelli.

DUCH. What could you find to entertain you in that disagreeable work?

DUKE. I found, madam, that a weak prince who neglects his duties is a greater curse to his people than a tyrant who oversteps them.

DUCH. What nonsense has the boy been filling his head with! My dear son, you should not distract yourself with studies beyond your age. I have been wishing to consult you about our masqued fête to-morrow evening. (*the DUKE bows*) Count Oscar, who has just returned from Paris, brings with him some designs of exquisite costumes. You recollect Count Oscar?

COUNT. (l. c.) My nephew, your Highness. (*OSCAR advances and bows conceitedly*)

DUKE. Oh, perfectly! That figure once seen could never be forgotten.

OSCAR. (l.) Your Highness honours me by your recollection. (*bows*)

DUKE. (*turning on his heel—aside*) I have a natural antipathy to that self-satisfied coxcomb. (*the DUKE's band is heard playing in the garden beneath the terrace*)

DUCH. What music is this?

COUNT. Music—a—a—you hear, Baron—

BARON. (l., confused) Yes—a—it seems to be—a—

An OFFICER who has been on the terrace comes down.

OFFICER. It is the band of His highness playing in the palace gardens.

DUCH. The band—of his Highness—*(goes towards the terrace at back and looks into the garden)* Ah, defend me! Have we a revolution? The royal gardens are filled with people. *(supports herself on the shoulders of an ATTENDANT, and speaks faintly)* Who has done this? Oh, Count! Baron! *(they appear embarrassed)* Speak! By whose order has this atrocity been committed?

DUKE. *(R., advancing)* By mine, madam. It was I who ventured to take the liberty.

DUCH. You, Victor! Oh! it will kill me—the noise—my head—you! my nerves,—but I have no right to speak. I, that have laboured beyond my strength—to—to save you from the toils of state; my flacon,—a feeble woman tottering to the grave.

DUKE. Madam, mother,—not by my will shall you endure a moment's pain. *(to an ATTENDANT)* Bid the music cease.

ATTENDANT bows, and goes out, c. to L.

BARON. *(apart to the Count)* You see he gives way. She bends him as she pleases.

COUNT. *(aside to BARON)* I'm not so sure of that.

BARON. *(the same)* Can you doubt it. *(the music stops)* There, there the music has stopped.

COUNT. *(the same)* Yes; but it was by the Duke's order.

DUKE. And now, mother, let me tell you something that affords me great pleasure.

DUCH. What is it, my dear Victor?

DUKE. An old and very dear friend is coming to spend some time with me.

DUCH. A friend!

DUKE. A most intimate and trusted friend, with whom I have been long acquainted.

DUCH. Oh! one of your gay companions, I suppose.

DUKE. By no means: he is a man of studious habits and profound observation.

DUCH. And his name is—?

DUKE. Pardon me, my friend is rather eccentric on some points; he has a fancy for remaining unknown, and has received my word not to disclose his name.

DUCH. How, then, can we receive him at Court? Ask the Grand Chamberlain—can we receive a person without a name, Baron?

BARON. Decidedly not, your Highness. If the individual came without a head, it would be no objection; but a man without a name is literally out of Court, and his reception would be altogether without precedent.

DUKE. I don't apprehend we shall have any difficulty on points of etiquette, Baron; for although my friend mixes a great deal in the best society, it is not his wish to be recognized here.

BARON. Ah, he travels incog.

DUKE. Strictly; and as he will be quite unattended, and will be my guest in my private apartments, he will be in nobody's way.

COUNT. *(aside)* I always suspect your people that are in nobody's way—they generally trip up your heels when you least expect them.

DUCH. But, my dear Victor, people will ask who the stranger is, and what he does at Court.

DUKE. Well, you can say he's my secret agent.

DUCH. (*alarmed*) Your secret agent?

BARON. Secret—

COUNT. Agent—

DUKE. Even so; and to prove to you that he possesses the best information upon the most important matters, (*produces a letter*) he writes me here from Brunswick—

COUNT. From the Court of Brunswick, your Highness?

DUKE. From the Court:—he writes me such a strange piece of news, ha, ha, ha! You know the Princess Amelia, Count?

DUCH. (*starts*) The Princess!

COUNT, (*embarrassed*) No, no—that is—we—the Duchess—her Highness.

DUCH. *I* know the Princess, my son.

DUKE. Well, he tells me amongst other things, that there is a project at our Court, to bring about—ha, ha, ha!—to bring about a marriage between the Princess and myself.

DUCH. Who tells you that?

DUKE. My secret agent.

COUNT. (*apart to BARON*) I feel the ground slipping from beneath my feet.

DUKE. Is it true, madam, that you would kindly spare me even the trouble of choosing a wife?

DUKE. I confess, Victor, the idea occurred to me, as it did to the Count, that it was time to think about a suitable alliance for you.

COUNT. An alliance that might be entirely agreeable to your Highness.

DUKE. Well, from what my secret agent writes to me about the Princess, I really think I might do worse than marry her.

COUNT. (*aside*) A millstone has fallen from my neck.

DUKE. He tells me she is a very charming person.

DUCH. He knows her then?

DUKE. Intimately! He says she is young, witty, amiable—

COUNT. And a perfect miracle of beauty.

DUKE. I thought you did not know her, Count.

COUNT. No, not personally, but I have seen her picture, and she is lovely.

DUKE. So my secret agent informs me—

COUNT. (*aside to DUCHESS*) Then he is in the interest of Brunswick.

A SERVANT enters, L., and gives the DUKE a letter which he opens, and glancing at it, utters an exclamation of joyful surprise.

DUCH. What is it, Victor?

DUKE. He has arrived.

ALL. Who?

DUKE. My secret agent.

BARON. So sudden. (COUNT crosses, from R. to L. The DUCHESS COUNT and BARON appear dismayed)

DUCH. So soon.

COUNT. So very soon.

DUCH. Will he not make his appearance?

DUKE. No, he insists on strict privacy.

BARON. It will be proper, however, that I should wait upon him.

COUNT. The Baron and myself, your Highness.

BARON. To offer him a few trifling civilities.

COUNT. To place my carriage at his disposal.

DUKE. Useless, Count;—my secret agent dislikes riding in a carriage.

COUNT. My horses then.

DUKE. My secret agent always walks.

BARON. He will require servants.

DUKE. Mine are at his disposal.

COUNT. Is it possible he wants nothing?

DUKE. Nothing!

COUNT. (*aside*) Happy man! (*the DUKE bows to the DUCHESS, and is going, when she calls to him*)

DUCH. You are not leaving me, Victor. I thought we should have your company for the afternoon. What is it draws you away so suddenly?

DUKE. Pardon, madam; I go to receive my secret agent.

Exit DUKE, c. and r.

COUNT. } His secret agent!

BARON. }

DUCH. (*in a loud voice*) Yes; you heard the words, and it is now your duty to tell me who this man is that has penetrated suddenly into the very heart of the Court, and seems to have unbounded influence over the Duke. You, Count Steinhausen, with your matchless system of police, and your new invention by which you have the portrait of every stranger who enters the duchy taken while his passport is being *viseé*, tell me who is this man, or at least show me his portrait.

COUNT. Your Highness, for once I am at fault—this stranger has come upon me like a thunderbolt.

DUCH. You, Baron, who have spies in every corner of the palace, what do you know about my son's visitor?

BARON. Absolutely nothing, your Highness; it appears he has eluded all our vigilance.

DUCH. And this is your zeal—your gratitude—after protecting you for sixteen years.

BARON. Can you doubt our attachment to your Highness—our devotion to your interest—

COUNT. Identified as it is with our own.

DUCH. (*crosses to L.*) Prove it then, by finding out who this intruder is, or dread my anger.

Exit DUCHESS, L., with ATTENDANTS, and OSCAR.

COUNT. Baron, we are lost unless we can crush this mysterious stranger.

BARON. Crush him! How? Let us lay our heads together and try to think.

COUNT. Our only hope of safety is by supporting each other steadily.

BARON. (*grasps his arm*) You see how I cling to you!

COUNT. Hush! I see Robert, the Duke's valet, coming from his Highness' private apartments.

Enter ROBERT, R.

Well, Robert?

ROBERT. Baron Standbach, his Highness informs you, that he will not require from you the usual daily reports.

BARON. Very extraordinary.

ROBERT. His Highness also informs Count Steinhausen, that the ministers can assemble without him this afternoon in the apartment of the Duchess.

COUNT. Eh! The Duke will perhaps be out riding at this time?

ROBERT. No, Count, he will be engaged on important business with—(*mysteriously*)—his secret agent.

COUNT. Ha-ah!

BARON. Ha-ah!

ROBERT bows and exit, R.

COUNT. I foresaw it: we are to be flung aside like a pair of old shoes.

BARON. Worn out pumps, in fact!

COUNT. What is to be done? If we could only discover who this secret agent is—only see him—and speak to him—

BARON. Can't we bribe Robert—the Duke's valet?

COUNT. I'm sorry to say he's incorruptible.

(NETTCHEN sings without, c. l.)

COUNT. Hist! there's his wife; she may be accessible, and through her—hey?—fortune be praised—here she comes.

Enter NETTCHEN, c. from L., singing; she carries a box and a bouquet.

NETT. Ta-ral-la, la-ral-la, la-ral-la, la-la, &c. (*perceives COUNT and BARON*) I—I beg your Excellency's pardon—I was going—a—

COUNT. You were going—

NETT. Yes, your Excellency, I was going. (*going*)

COUNT. (*stopping her*) But where?

NETT. With this bouquet, which was left by a page a few minutes since with the palace porter, for—

COUNT. } For whom?

BARON. }

NETT. The Duke's secret agent

COUNT. (L.) A bouquet—from an unknown hand, the very hour he arrives at Court—

BARON. (R.) He! Depend upon it it's a *she*; the agent is a woman—a woman! People don't send bouquets to men—and such a bouquet too. (*takes it from NETTCHEN*)

COUNT. There may be some private correspondence concealed in it. (*snatches it from BARON and rummages among the flowers*) No, nothing—nothing! What is that box you carry, Nettchen?

NETT. (c.) This, (*holds it up*) your Excellency? A box that my husband charged me to take great care of, as it belongs to the Duke's secret agent.

COUNT. Hah! I'm not inquisitive, but I have a curiosity to see what that box contains.

NETT. La! your Excellency, I durst not, indeed; my husband would kill me.

BARON. We'll protect you, child; only let us look into that box.

NETT. Not for the world! I don't think that ten crowns in my hand could tempt me.

COUNT. Ten crowns! You shall have them. There, there!—
(gives her money)

BARON. There, there. (gives her money)

NETT. Well, mind it's not my doing.

COUNT. Now. (opens the box and takes out a brown wig) Hey! a wig. The secret agent wears a brutus—he's a man.

BARON. (taking a lady's cap out of box) I beg your pardon, the secret agent wears a lace cap—she's a woman! (they hold the cap and wig together and then thrust them into the box, NETTCHEN receives them with a curtsey)

NETT. I trust to your Excellency never mentioning what you have seen. Ha, ha, ha!

They turn away impatiently. Exit NETTCHEN, R.

BARON. I'm certain the agent is a woman.

COUNT. And I'm satisfied he's a man.

Enter a SERVANT, carrying a tray covered with a cloth, L..

Hey! Where is that fellow going? Hum! You fellow; what—a—have you there?

SERVANT. (c.) Lunch, your Excellency!

COUNT. (r.) Ah, lunch! this is not the Duke's hour for lunching.

SERVANT. No, your Excellency, it is for his Highness' secret agent.

COUNT. Oh, his secret agent. Let's see, what has he got, hey.

BARON. (l.) Aye, let's see. (uncovering one dish) A roasted lark. She's a woman!

COUNT. (uncovering the other dish) Devilled kidneys. He's a man! (they replace the covers on the dishes)

Exit SERVANT, R.

BARON. I repeat, she's a woman, Count, a woman!

Exit, L.

COUNT. A man, Baron, a man! Now he's gone I can reflect upon my position. This secret agent will turn my flank if I don't take care. Humph! I must see the Duke and inform him of the marriage which the Duchess and I have arranged between Mademoiselle Ernestine and my nephew Oscar. He can know nothing about the affair yet as it was only settled this morning; so I'll be the first to tell him of it.

Enter DUKE, R.

(COUNT, *bowing*) Your Highness, I was about to seek an interview with you.

DUKE. More papers to sign, Count?

COUNT. No, no, not at all. I merely wished to make a confidential communication to your Highness, to impart a little secret.

DUKE. (*eagerly*) A secret? (*checking himself—aside*) I must affect indifference that he may imagine I know it. Keep it, Count, I have no desire to pry into affairs that do not concern me.

COUNT. But this matter does concern your Highness, it relates to a person in whom you naturally take an interest.

DUKE. Indeed! (*aside*) How shall I be able to worm it from him. I understand, Count.

COUNT. That it is of Mademoiselle Ernestine, I speak?

DUKE. Ernestine! (*checking himself*) Yes.

COUNT. The matter will probably be communicated to you in a few days by her Highness, the Duchess.

DUKE. (*carelessly*) Well, I can wait; or what say you, Count, if I am already in possession of this profound secret?

COUNT. (*astonished*) How—aware of the gracious intention of her Highness—

DUKE. My mother, with respect to that affair—

COUNT. The marriage of Mademoiselle Ernestine?

DUKE. Exactly; the marriage of my cousin—

COUNT. With my nephew?

DUKE. (*starts*) What! (*collects himself*) With Count Oscar; I am already informed of the project.

COUNT. Perhaps by her Highness, the Duchess?

DUKE. No; by my secret agent.

COUNT. (*aside*) I thought so.

DUKE. (*sits on sofa. R., and takes up a newspaper*) Is that all you have to say, Count? You see that your secrets are valueless to me—I know them already.

COUNT. Yes, your Highness, I perceive you do, and I am quite confounded. It is true, I have constantly reproached myself, and regretted that I was not permitted to inform you of everything that passed, as it certainly was my duty to do; but, for the future—

DUKE. (*rises*) Enough of apologies, my good Count, I now know everything that you could possibly communicate.

COUNT. Every—thing, your Highness?

DUKE. Everything, Count Steinhausen.

COUNT. (*takes a paper from his pocket*) Not excepting the contents of this dispatch to the Court of Bavaria?

DUKE. (*eagerly*) To the Court—(*recovering himself—aside*) What can it be about? Not excepting that; or if not, I am sure to learn it to-day, in a manner less compromising for you, (*the COUNT gazes anxiously at the DUKE*) through my secret agent. (*rejects the paper by a motion of his hand*) The time is gone by, my dear Count, when a communication of that kind from you might have been received as a service rendered me.

COUNT. (*wipes the perspiration from his forehead*) I am in despair. Suffer me to entreat your Highness, at least, to favor me with your opinion of the matter referred to in the dispatch, that I may be able to act conformably with your Highness's wishes and your interests.

DUKE. (*takes the paper and glances over it—represents a movement of surprise and displeasure—aside*) A dishonorable treaty with Bavaria! (*aloud*) I knew of this affair, and shall give my opinion of it to my mother; but will not mention that I have seen this paper. (*gives back paper to COUNT*) Go, and make your report to the Duchess; you may compromise yourself by remaining too long with the Duke.

COUNT. (*aside*) This secret agent is the devil—he knows everything.

Exit, L.

DUKE. (*rings table bell*) Here's a fine discovery. (*walks about in excited manner*)

Enter SERVANT, R.

My hat and cane. I must take a turn in the park. I want fresh air. What a position I am placed in:—intrigues without end; affairs of state carried on in my name, of which I know nothing; a wife chosen for me, without my consent; and Ernestine's hand promised to Count Oscar—I always disliked that coxcomb,—now I detest him: and she loves him, of course she does—the base, fickle, false-hearted—psha—what am I saying. She may marry the fool if she pleases, it is nothing to me.

Enter ERNESTINE, c. from L. and comes down, L., and meets him as he is going off hastily.

ERNEST. Where are you going in such violent haste, Duke?

DUKE. To—to the garden, for a walk.

ERNEST. For a walk, without your hat? (*takes his hat from table, and gives it to him*) Pray put it on, the day is cool.

DUKE. I think it insufferably hot, mademoiselle.

ERNEST. Your Highness seems discomposed—has anything happened to disturb you?

DUKE. Nothing, that I have a right to complain of—I have been highly amused by a pleasant story just related to me, of woman's fickleness and man's folly.

ERNEST. And pray who told this agreeable romance to your Highness?

DUKE. (*with intention*) My secret agent, mademoiselle. (*bows and puts on his hat*)

Exit grandly, c. to R.

ERNEST. His secret agent—ha, ha, ha, ha! My serene cousin is slightly ruffled this morning. (*imitating him*) My secret agent, mademoiselle—ha, ha, ha! (*sits, R. C.*) He forgets that it was I who taught him his part. But I must discover what it is that has put him in such a strange mood.

Enter NETTCHEN laughing, L.

Well, Nettchen, what is it that amuses you so?

NETT. Oh! mademoiselle, I beg pardon, but I have just quitted

the Count, and never did you see a man in such a state of alarm. He fears to speak above his breath, lest he should be overheard by the secret agent; and he won't utter a word until he has peeped under every chair and table, and behind every window curtain in the room.

ERNEST. The poor Count!

NETT. All he wants is to discover who this mysterious stranger is; and do you know, mademoiselle, he offered me ever so much money to procure him sight or speech of him.

ERNEST. Which of course you refused? (*rises*)

NETT. Of course, ma'amselle, a woman always begins by refusing what she means to have; I said no to the last, but I couldn't help taking the gold when he forced it on me.

ERNEST. And you have betrayed my confidence?

NETT. Not in the least, ma'amselle. I promised everything as in duty bound, and now I've come to you to know what I am to do?

ERNEST. It is better perhaps that he should imagine that he has secured you in his interest, and now I must tell you the information you picked up from the Count's valet, and some matters which I have myself collected from other quarters, have enabled me to carry out a plan for increasing the ministerial perplexity. This paper is the engine by which my purpose is to be effected. (*produces a paper*) I have merely to drop it where the Count may find it.

NETT. Then, ma'amselle, you had better set your trap as quickly as possible, for here comes the Count across the hall. (*looking off, L.*)

ERNEST. (*dropping paper, c.*) There then I leave it, and now to vanish.

Exeunt ERNESTINE and NETTCHEN, c. to r.

Enter COUNT STEINHAUSEN, very cautiously, L.

COUNT. Hem, hem! (*looks about anxiously*) Good gracious, this is a dreadful situation to be perpetually under the eye of an invisible observer, who reports everything—hey! Who's there? I beg pardon, eh?—mind I said nothing, I was only thinking—eh?—thinking that I thought;—if there's anybody listening I beg to inform him that I'm not afraid, eh? (*turns quickly from one side to the other*) No—hey! (*perceives paper on the ground*) What's this? (*opens and examines it—reads*) “Notes for daily reports to his Highness the Duke, from his secret”—ha! (*crushes the paper and thrusts it in his breast*) This is important; let me be quite certain I am alone. (*searches through the room*) Nobody—nobody, a cat could not be concealed here. Now to look at this precious document. (*draws the paper from his breast and reads in evident agitation and alarm*) “Notes for daily report to his Highness the Duke, from his secret agent.” He has accidentally dropped them. Haah! now I shall penetrate this mysterious business. (*reads*) “Mem. Count Steinhausen rang his bell this morning at nine o'clock precisely—had a private interview with his barber and descended to breakfast at ten o'clock.” How the devil did he know that? (*reads*) “The Count's appetite was not so good as usual,”—it was decidedly worse,—“he could only nibble a slice or two of brawn, a plate of Perigord

pie, a couple of eggs, with two cups of coffee, and one French roll." Bless me, he keeps an account not only of every word that comes out of my mouth, but of every bit that goes into it. (*reads*) "After breakfast the Count seemed much invigorated, and damned the secret agent emphatically." Oh, this is really scandalous, it's perfectly inquisitorial! But what's this here? (*reads*) "Mem. The ministry is shaken to its foundation, the Duchess is prepared to sacrifice the Count." Haah! I suspected that, but I'll be beforehand with her. (*reads*) "And the Count only waits an opportunity to betray the Duchess." Scoundrel! how did he discover that? (*reads*) "The affair his Highness did me the honor to trust to my management is progressing favorably; I shall be found feeding the ducks on the pond in the park this evening, precisely as the clock strikes six." Here's a complication of difficulties, enough to turn a man's brain—what shall I do? Hah! a lucky thought, if I were to watch for this secret agent,—he will be at the fish pond at six o'clock;—I might introduce myself to him there—at all events, I should see and know this secret disturber of my peace. Yes, I'll be there at six. (*goes up stage reading the paper*)

Enter COUNT OSCAR, c. from L., and is crossing hastily to L. D.

COUNT. Ah, Oscar you seem, in haste. But I must detain you to mention something that may interest you.

OSCAR. As briefly, uncle, as may be convenient to you; for I have been commanded to attend the Duchess on her afternoon promenade.

COUNT. In two words then—I have arranged a marriage for you.

OSCAR. Really! well, I shall be submissive; marriage is a penalty which our sex must one time or another pay to society. By-the-bye if it's a fair question, who is the happy lady?

COUNT. Mademoiselle Ernestine.

OSCAR. Singular!

COUNT. In what way?

OSCAR. Why, that I should absolutely have had an idea of falling in love with the lady in question;—that is, as far as a gentleman should fall in love. She's a doosed fine girl.

COUNT. And with her connections we shall strengthen our interest, and be a match for this accursed secret agent who—Ah—(*checks himself and speaks in OSCAR's ear*)—he may at this moment be listening to us.

OSCAR. Ridiculous! what have you to fear? Now for my part—

COUNT. There, say no more; but lose no time in your wooing—everything depends upon celerity in the present crisis.

OSCAR. I shall present myself to her, and the affair is concluded.

Enter the DUCHESS and ERNESTINE, L., attended by the BARON and LADIES and GENTLEMEN of the Court—they are dressed for walking.

DUCH. Count Steinhausen.

COUNT. (*bowing*) Your Highness.

DUCH. I would speak with you. (*she motions to the others to leave them alone*) I can defer my walk for the present.

*The LADIES and GENTLEMEN exeunt by the terrace, R. and L.
OSCAR conducting ERNESTINE exeunt by terrace, L.—the BARON
goes up the stage.*

DUCH. (*to COUNT*) I perceive your nephew is here. You have communicated to him my intentions respecting his alliance with my niece?

COUNT. I have, madam, and he has expressed the most profound gratitude to your Highness. But—ahem—I hope there may be no interference—

DUCH. Interference, Count! Whose interference do you apprehend?

COUNT. (*looking round suspiciously—in a suppressed voice*) The secret agent's. That diabolical being who delights in frustrating our most cherished projects; who hears and sees, and knows everything, and who, I believe, is like the devil—always at our elbow.

The DUKE, who has entered, c. from R., unperceived by the COUNT and the DUCHESS, comes close to the COUNT, and places his hand upon his shoulder.

DUKE. (*R.*) Just as I might be, Count?

COUNT. (*starting*) Ha—ah! Your Highness—I—ah—didn't perceive that—Ha, ha, ha, ha! I was merely observing to her Highness that we—she—I—your Highness— (*aside*) I'm getting myself into a pretty quagmire. Hem! Do I make myself intelligible to your Highness?

DUKE. Perfectly—though you have said nothing. I understand everything you would say, and everything you would not say—that's the advantage of having a secret agent.

DUCH. (*crosses to c.*) This nameless person must be a very dear friend of yours, my son.

DUKE. So dear, madam, that I feel he is absolutely necessary to my existence.

DUCH. Is he such a perfect creature, then?

DUKE. By no means: I regret to say that he is weak, facile, and indolent; but I believe he is not a bad fellow at heart, and I am certain that he is sincerely attached to me. (*goes towards the terrace, and looks into the garden*)

COUNT. (*to DUCHESS*) The most extraordinary infatuation I ever knew.

DUCH. What is he looking at so earnestly?

BARON. (*approaching the DUKE*) Your Highness, I presume, is admiring the two new summer houses by the lake? The designs, I may observe, are mine.

DUKE. Ah, Baron, your designs have not escaped me—but I was not then admiring your summer houses.

BARON. Oh, I perceive—'tis the gigantic flowering aloe that attracts your Highness's notice.

COUNT. (*aside to COUNTESS*) He's looking for some person.

BARON. And to think of that superb plant only flowering once in a century.

DUKE. But nature has recompensed us, Baron, by giving us magnificent chamberlains, who bloom every day in the year.

BARON. (*bowing profoundly*) Your Highness condescends to flatter me. (*aside*) I wonder how the Count like's that.

DUKE. Hey! Was not that my secret agent I caught a glimpse of?

COUNT. (*eagerly*) Where, your Highness?

DUKE. In the garden. I have lost sight of him now amongst the shrubs.

COUNT. Shall I have the honour of seeking him for your Highness, and communicate to him your Highness's pleasure?

DUKE. By no means, Count; I dare say I shall meet him in my private apartments.

Bows and exit, R.

DUCH. You are right, Count, there is a secret influence in the palace which must be destroyed.

COUNT. Decidedly, your Highness; but the question is—how is it to be done?

DUCH. Let us consult upon the means. (*she sits, R. C., and motions the COUNT to sit near her*)

COUNT. (*aside*) This is dreadfully awkward. (*looks at his watch*) 'Tis near six o'clock—the hour at which the secret agent is to be waiting at the fish pond.

DUCH. Be seated, Count. (*COUNT bows, looks at his watch, and sits, L. C.; the DUCHESS enters into conversation with him—he seems restless and inattentive*) You must be aware, Count, that it is impossible I can consent to have my authority in the state shaken by this invisible counsellor whom my son keeps near his person—one of us must retire.

COUNT. Let it be me, then—(*rising*)—I am quite ready to go.

DUCH. Sit down, Count, you misunderstand me—what I want is your advice.

COUNT. (*abstractedly*) Certainly, your Highness. I am exactly of your opinion.

DUCH. But I am divided between two courses—which shall I take?

COUNT. Both.

DUCH. Both?

COUNT. Yes. (*looking at his watch*) The time is come.

DUCH. Then you fear some sudden blow?

COUNT. It will strike directly.

DUCH. (*starts*) Ha! you know it—from what quarter?

COUNT. The Tower.

DUCH. Good heavens!—why do you not speak intelligibly? this suspense is horrible. (*the COUNT wholly abstracted, and listening*) What is to happen? You know something which you fear to reveal. (*lays hold of his arm*) I have firmness to hear the worst.

COUNT. Hark!

DUCH. You terrify me. Have I enemies?

COUNT. Ah! enemies—everywhere. Conspirators! (*the clock strikes Six.—The COUNT reckons the strokes on his fingers*)

DUCH. Conspirators! Where?—How many?

COUNT. Six. (*starts up*) By the fish pond, feeding the ducks.

Goes off precipitately, by terrace, R., and runs against the BARON, who enters from terrace, R. C.

BARON comes down, c.

DUCH. Six conspirators feeding the ducks—what does he mean?

BARON. Your Highness, I can scarcely speak. Count Steinhausen has rushed out without his hat, looking so wild, along the terrace. He's certainly mad.

DUCH. (*rises*) Mad! that never occurred to me; yes, he must be mad. My dear Baron, for heaven's sake run—fly. Poor Count Steinhausen has gone mad—raving mad.

BARON. You may see him running like a Red Indian across the garden.

DUCH. Take some of the servants, Baron, and secure him; or he may do himself an injury.

DUCHESS goes on terrace, R.

BARON. I fly, your Highness, I fly—unfortunate man—I thought he was too great a rogue to lose his wits.

Exit from terrace, R.

Enter ERNESTINE and COUNT OSCAR, conversing, from terrace, L.

OSCAR. I assure you, the story was the newest in the salons of Paris last week—doosed good, wasn't it? But it don't seem to amuse you.

ERNEST. Not particularly, Count. I hate scandal.

OSCAR. Then, in the name of fashion, how do you contrive to exist at Court?

ERNEST. Oh, very pleasantly, when I am not teased by fools and coxcombs.

OSCAR. Well, let us speak of something that may interest you—Love, for instance.

ERNEST. More insupportable still.

OSCAR. Well, it is fatiguing, certainly. The Arcadian passion has become so threadbare, that it is really impossible to clothe a new idea with it.

ERNEST. Pray oblige me, then, by being silent upon the subject.

OSCAR. Oh, impossible! those charms compel me to be eloquent. Deign then to listen to me, while I unburden my heart. (*she turns away*) Angelic being, hear the humblest of your adorers, who—

The DUCHESS re-appears on the terrace, R.

who—who—from this moment devotes his whole existence to—
(*sees DUCHESS*) a—pardon—a slight interruption. (*rises—aside*) I positively had not another word to say. *Au revoir, mademoiselle, au revoir.*

Exit, c. to L., humming an air.

DUCH. (*comes down, L.*) I perceive that Count Oscar has been speaking to you, Ernestine; and, from your heightened color, I can guess the subject of your conversation.

ERNEST. I assure your Highness, I never—

DUCH. There, I require no protestations, child. What I have to say is, that it is time you were placed in that position which you must naturally expect to fill; and as your nearest relative and protector, I have been seeking for you a suitable husband.

ERNEST. I am most grateful to you, aunt; but a husband is like a gown, we are never satisfied with one unless we choose it ourselves.

DUCH. You talk like a forward, foolish girl. How could a giddy creature like you know how to choose a husband? Leave that task, mademoiselle, to your friends—who understand those matters—and prepare yourself to receive with befitting gratitude, Count Oscar for your future husband.

ERNEST. Count Oscar is a conceited puppy.

DUCH. Mademoiselle!

ERNEST. Whom I can never love.

DUCH. It is not of love we speak, mademoiselle, but of marriage.

ERNEST. But, a marriage without love—

DUCH. Is the best guarantee for independence on both sides. (*the DUKE appears at door, r., and listens*)

ERNEST. I hate Count Oscar.

DUCH. Be it so—but you will marry him.

ERNEST. My dear aunt, have mercy on me—I cannot marry this man. If my heart were free, I might yield to your wishes but—

DUCH. (*roused*) What, you have not dared to bestow your heart without my sanction. Unhappy girl! How am I to understand your words? You love— (*the DUKE enters unperceived*)

ERNEST. I do.

DUCH. Prodigious boldness! What will the world come to, when girls fall in love on their own account? When did your inclinations forget their duty, mademoiselle? Who is the object of your passion? Speak! Must I blush for your answer?

ERNEST. Do not blame me, my dear aunt, that I cannot love the man you have selected for me: he whom I do love, I love with my whole heart and soul! Were it not so, could I have the courage to make this confession, and oppose myself to your wishes and commands? (*the DUKE, at back*)

DUCH. His name—his name!

ERNEST. I tremble to pronounce it.

DUCH. Tremble, wretched girl, if it brings disgrace upon your family.

ERNEST. Disgrace, Duchess! Let the blood of our family, which now burns indignantly on my cheek, answer for me, that the object of my love is not unworthy of me. In every attribute that may adorn a man, he stands amongst the noblest of this Court.

DUCH. (*astonished*) Of this Court?

ERNEST. Yes, Duchess—but the position he occupies is so peculiar, that, I scarcely dare explain myself further.

DUCH. Leave these enigmas, and instantly declare who is the man, to whom you have surrendered your heart. I will know it.

ERNEST. You shall, Duchess:—the moment is come, when I can

no longer deny, recede, nor keep silence. I love—Oh! blame not my unhappy attachment—I love the Duke's secret agent. (ERNESTINE sinks at the feet of the DUCHESS)

DUCH. Horror! This dreadful being meets me at every turn. Dismiss him instantly from your thoughts, or you shall have reason to repent of your folly. Not a word—I will hear nothing from you—implicit obedience to my commands, can alone atone for your fault.

The DUCHESS exits in a great rage, l., while ERNESTINE remains kneeling with her face buried in her hands. The DUKE then comes forward and gently raises ERNESTINE, who on perceiving him, utters an exclamation of surprise and alarm.

ERNEST. Ah—you—your Highness—let me—let me be gone, or I must expire with shame. You have overheard my foolish presumptuous words. (*endeavours to disengage herself from him*)

DUKE. (*retaining her*) I have heard a sweet confession from the lips of the most beloved of her sex, that makes me the happiest of mine.

ERNEST. But you cannot value the heart that bestows itself unsought.

DUKE. Unsought, but not unprized; for empires could not purchase from me the precious gift. You know not, Ernestine, how deeply—how devotedly I love you! I knew it not myself, until I felt I was in danger of losing you, and then I thought your heart was given to another; but the noble avowal of your attachment, has removed every doubt from my mind.

ERNEST. But will the Duchess consent?

DUKE. She must not be informed of it, until I have completely liberated myself from the meshes in which I have been so long unconsciously held. My secret agent is performing wonders. (*a noise of struggling and violent remonstrance is heard without*)

COUNT. (*outside*) Help—ho! Murder—treason! hillo! Rascals, I'll have you whipped for this. Call the guard. Help—ho!

DUKE. What uproar is this?

COUNT STEINHAUSEN is carried in from terrace, r., by four SERVANTS, his wig has got awry, and his clothes disordered in the struggle—the BARON enters, preceding them, down R. C.

COUNT. Justice, your Highness. I demand justice for myself, and immediate hanging, drawing, and quartering, for the traitors who have insulted your Highness in the person of your Highness's Prime Minister.

DUKE. (c.) Explain this, Baron.

BARON. (l. c.) A sad case, your Highness: the unfortunate Count has gone stark mad—we had the utmost difficulty in securing him.

COUNT. (r. c.) Mad! I deny it, indignantly. Let me prove my sanity.

DUKE. Release the Count. (*the SERVANTS let him go*)

COUNT. At length the constitution is free, and thus the executive asserts its power. (*knocks down one of the SERVANTS*) Pardon the

natural impulse, your Highness. I have been shamefully treated, never has a prime minister been handled as I have. I ask, by whose order have I been seized? Who says that I am mad?

BARON. (*aside*) Hey, I have an idea. I'll—yes—I'll hazard it.

COUNT. (*loftily*) I repeat my interrogatory, Baron.—Who asserts that I am mad?

BARON. (*authoritatively*) The secret agent.

COUNT. (*paralysed*) The se— Ah, I'm satisfied. (*sinks in a chair*. DUKE and EARNESTINE *laugh*; the other characters express astonishment. *Tableau as Act Drop descends.*

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

A richly-furnished Saloon in the Palace of Duke Victor, arranged for a Fête; a second Saloon beyond the first, with which it communicates by lofty arches at back. Both Saloons are brilliantly lighted, and in the distance are seen the Palace Gardens, illuminated with coloured lamps. Door, 2 E. R.; another large door, 2 E. L.

Enter COUNT STEINHAUSEN, L.

COUNT. I have turned the matter in my mind until I have nearly turned my head with it, and can hit on no plan for discovering who this secret disturber can be. Yesterday I was on his track, and must have pounced upon him by the pond if the Duchess had not fallen into the extraordinary mistake of supposing I was mad, and sent that fussy fool the Grand Chamberlain to secure me. I've been the laughing stock of the Court ever since; but that I should not mind, if I could have had five minutes' conversation with the secret agent.

Enter NETTCHEN, from further saloon, R., *humming an air*.

There's that little Nettchen buzzing about the Court like a May fly: she could give me a hint if she would. (*calls her*) Nettchen.

NETT. (*pretends to start*) Oh, dear! Ha, your Excellency startled me so, I thought it was—

COUNT. Who—who?

NETT. (*mysteriously*) The secret agent!

COUNT. The very person I was going to speak to you about. You know him?

NETT. (*shakes her head, and places her hand on her mouth*) M—m—m—mum!

COUNT. I perceive: lips sealed—must not speak—but you may drop a friendly hint.

NETT. Can't, indeed! (*shakes her head*)

COUNT. Nettchen, you're too prudent a young woman to shut

your eyes or your hand to your own interest. (*places a purse in her hand*)

NETT. Bless me, what's this ?

COUNT. Never mind, never mind—put it up.

NETT. And ask no questions ?

COUNT. Ask no questions, but answer all I shall put to you ; tell me, in short, what you know about this secret agent, and you shall find I can be doubly liberal.

NETT. Oh, I know nothing about him.

COUNT. Of course you don't—I admire your caution, Nettchen—but you may know somebody who does ; and if a hundred florins would be an object to that person, I'd gladly give them to obtain an interview with this mysterious personage.

NETT. A hundred florins ? Well, perhaps it may be done ; I can't promise but it may happen that a person will be at the Duchess's masked fête here to-night.

COUNT. A person ! I understand. We name no names :—perfectly diplomatic, Nettchen—go on.

NETT. A person who will be dressed as Mephistopheles.

COUNT. A most appropriate character for a secret agent.

NETT. If you should meet him you are not to speak first.

COUNT. It will be etiquette for him to open the conversation. You're quite right.

NETT. But if he should pronounce the word "Chop," you will immediately reply "Stick."

COUNT. Hey—"Chop-stick." I understand—'tis a pass word "Chop-stick"—I shan't forget "Chop-stick." Clever little creature. "Chop-stick!"

NETT. Of course, your Excellency will be masked, and it will be necessary for you to wear some particular costume by which you may be recognised.

COUNT. You're right, Nettchen : I'll disguise myself as a Spanish lady, and look out for Mephistopheles and his "Chop."

NETT. But your Excellency will recollect you heard nothing from me.

COUNT. Nothing—nothing, you sly little rogue. "Chop-stick!" I must go immediately, and provide my costume. "Chop-stick!"

Exit COUNT, R. U. E.

NETT. And I must go and find the Grand Chamberlain.

Enter ROBERT unperceived, L.

How easily a woman can make fools of these men.

ROBERT. What's that you say, wife, women make fools of men ? I suppose you'll say that you have made a fool of me.

NETT. Oh, dear, no ; nature saved me that trouble.

ROBERT. How came it then, that you took a fancy to a fool ?

NETT. I really don't know, unless it was because a fool took a fancy to me.

ROBERT. You are a saucy little baggage; but never mind. Have you seen Count Steinhause, as the Duke directed ?

NETT. He has just parted from me, and has left me this slight token of his gratitude. (*shows ROBERT the purse*)

ROBERT. Pretty and generous. Is it heavy? (*offers to take it—she holds it behind her back*)

NETT. So heavy that I can't think of burthening you with it. However, you may tell his Highness that the Count will be at the fête, dressed as a Spanish Lady, in the expectation of meeting the Secret Agent disguised as Mephistopheles—and I'm now going to Baron Standbach, who is equally anxious to make the acquaintance of the Secret Agent, to persuade him to assume that character, for the purpose of satisfying himself that this mysterious stranger is, as he suspects, a woman. (*crosses to L.*)

ROBERT. Ha, ha, ha! What a genius for intrigue you have, Nettchen—a Richelieu in petticoats. (*music piano*) It will be choice sport to see the two Court foxes leading each other into the trap. But I must hasten to the Duke with my intelligence, for I see the company has begun to arrive. *Exit ROBERT, R., and NETTCHEN, L.*

Several MASKS enter at back and promenade in the further saloon—music at intervals. Then enter the DUCHESS, c. from L., accompanied by ERNESTINE, COUNT OSCAR, and attended by LADIES and GENTLEMEN of the Court. The MASKS salute the DUCHESS, who graciously acknowledges their courtesy.

DUCH. (R.) This is really charming.

OSCAR. (L.) Absolutely ravishing! The late grand fete at Malmaison, to which I was invited by the Empress, was not near so brilliant.

ERNEST. (c.) How deliciously that distant music comes upon the ear across the lake. (*the DUCHESS retires to her LADIES, but observes ERNESTINE and OSCAR*)

OSCAR. Heavenly! It makes me feel so doosed susceptible. Don't you think so, mademoiselle?

ERNEST. Susceptible to what, Count?

OSCAR. Susceptible to—a—those sort of odd feelings, not feelings altogether, but that kind of softness, that—a—people are subject to; I can't exactly describe it, but I dare say you can't perceive it.

ERNEST. Your softness?

OSCAR. (L.) Oh, no—no—my—a—my susceptibility.

ERNEST. (c.) Not yet, Count, but I'll try to discover it.

OSCAR. (*aside*) Doosed clever girl—too clever though to be agreeable. (*crosses to R. and goes up stage*)

DUCH. (*comes down R.*) Ernestine! (*speaks to her apart*) I observed your mocking air while speaking to Count Oscar—you must learn, mademoiselle, to regard him as your future husband; and, as you value my friendship and protection, forget this spy—this secret disturber, who has been introduced so mysteriously into the palace.

ERNESTINE. But if I should find it impossible to forget him—if my heart refuses to cancel the willing vow of love which I made to him?

DUCH. Nonsense, child. In a Court, there are occasions where truth—gratitude—nay, love itself, must yield to a consideration for one's position.

ERNEST. Would you then counsel me to sacrifice my heart's affection?

DUCH. Sacrifice any thing but your interest.

Waltz music at a distance—COUNT OSCAR comes toward ERNESTINE, L.—*the same time that the DUKE, wearing a domino and mask, enters, R.*

OSCAR. There's an exhilarating waltz just begun. Will mademoiselle Ernestine permit me to have the honour? (*bows to ERNESTINE*)

ERNEST. I fear, Count, that I am engaged. (*looks at her engagement card*) Yes, for the first waltz.

DUCH. Engaged, mademoiselle, to whom pray?

ERNEST. To the Duke's secret agent, madam, and with the sanction of his Highness, as you will perceive by this note.

Gives the DUCHESS a paper, DUKE advances, gives his arm to ERNESTINE, salutes the DUCHESS, and exits with ERNESTINE at back.

OSCAR. Doosed cool fellow.

DUCH. This is beyond endurance. I am patient under injuries that might rouse the temper of the meekest woman in the world—but I can no longer submit to these repeated insults. (*confidentially*) Count, I have reason to know that the Duke's secret agent is your rival.

OSCAR. The devil—a—my rival?

DUCH. Yes, he pretends to the hand of your intended.

OSCAR. Does he? Poor fellow! I shall soon rectify that mistake. I'll make him aware that I have a claim in that quarter.

DUCH. But if he should refuse to recede?

OSCAR. Refuse? While Count Oscar wears a sword! If he does I must teach him a doosed sharp lesson.

DUCH. I applaud your spirit, Count. Go instantly and find him, and remember the only path to Ernestine's heart must be opened by your sword through the secret agent's.

OSCAR. I shall make it a point to remember your Highness's hint.

Bows and exits, c.

DUCH. Now if Oscar's hand do not fail him I shall soon be delivered from my secret enemy.

The music recommences at a distance, and the COMPANY commence dancing in the further saloon. The DUCHESS goes off at back and mingles with the COMPANY, her ATTENDANTS follow her.

Enter BARON, disguised as Mephistopheles.

BARON. Wonderful! Such a transformation has never I believe been witnessed. I was literally horror struck at getting a glimpse of myself in a mirror as I passed, for I could hardly imagine that a mild prepossessing Lord Chamberlain could look so diabolical. But where's this secret agent. I was right in my conjecture when I said she was a woman; little Nettchen who knows her, confessed as much, and promised that she should meet me here this evening. (*goes up*)

Enter COUNT STEINHAUSEN, in the costume of a Spanish Dancer, he carries a large fan, with which he conceals his face, other MASKS enter from upper saloon)

COUNT. There must be something singularly attractive either in my costume or my deportment, for everybody stares at me. Certainly it's an extraordinary appearance for a Prime Minister, but fortunately this wig and fan will prevent any one recognizing me. (music—*Spanish dance*) Ah! that Spanish music requires Spanish legs to translate it. (*imitates a Spanish pas*)

1ST. MASK. (R., crosses and salutes the COUNT) Hermosa senorita pongo mi corazon a tus pies.

COUNT. (c.) Buenas noches—Buenas noches! Good night! That's all the Spanish I have, but I find it passes very well, because, I suppose I understand as much of it as those who speak to me.

2ND MASK. (bows to COUNT) Me hara el honor la Senorita de bailar commigo.

COUNT. Eh, what's that? Oh yes—Buenas noches—good night.

2ND MASK. Does the Senorita speak Spanish?

COUNT. I repeat, Buenas noches! That's all I have to say—you had better go away, or papa may see you and be angry. Buenas noches.

2ND MASK. Oh, adios! lindisima. Adios! senorita. (crosses and goes up)

COUNT. Buenas noches—Good night. How distressing this general attention is. (other MASKS cross) Buenas noches—Buenas noches. I wish I could see my Mephistopheles amongst them. mixes amongst the MASKS up the stage, addressing them severally with 'Buenas noches.'

BARON. (perceives COUNT who comes down, R.) Ha!—tis she!

COUNT. (perceiving BARON) Ha! at length—he's here.

BARON. (aside) She's a splendid figure. Hem—hem—if it should happen, now, that I have hit her fancy — there's no reason why I should not—she may have observed my leg. I have done some execution with that leg amongst the fair sex. (puts out his leg affectedly) How she ogles me through her fan.

COUNT. I wish he would come out with his 'Chop.'

BARON. I should like to have a peep at her face.

COUNT. (aside) His silence is very strange. Hem—hem—hem—hem—

BARON. Perhaps this extraordinary coughing means that I am to break the ice, and now I recollect, Nettchen told me I was to give the password. Hem—hem—'Chop!'

COUNT. 'Stick!' (aside) It is he. (aloud) Be assured, sir, I feel the utmost pleasure in being thus allowed to make your very interesting acquaintance.

BARON. (aside) Where have I heard that voice before? And I esteem it the highest honor to have an opportunity of saying how much I am your devoted servant.

COUNT. (aside) These tones are not unfamiliar to my ear.

BARON. You cannot imagine how ardently I longed for this meeting.

COUNT. Language cannot express the profound admiration I feel for talent so exalted.

BARON. And if the humble offering of my homage may be accepted, madam—

COUNT. Madam!

BARON. Pardon,—mademoiselle! A virgin moon beneath an envious cloud.

COUNT. (*aside*) The secret agent's phraseology is decidedly florid but by no means intelligible.

BARON. The present moment is favorable for mutual confidence. Let there be no reserve between us.

COUNT. My idea exactly—will you take off your nose?

BARON. Impossible, before you disclose yourself.

COUNT. Both together, then.

BARON. I agree to that. Now, together. (*after a few feints and manœuvres on both sides, the Count withdraws his fan, and the Baron takes off his false nose and moustaches;—both start back in amazement at recognising each other*)

COUNT. Baron Stanbach!

BARON. Count Steinhausen!

COUNT. Can I believe my senses?

BARON. Am I bewitched?

COUNT. (*aside*) The Baron, then, is the secret agent. Unparalleled treachery!

BARON. (*aside*) Unheard of duplicity!

COUNT. (*aside*) That he should have taken us all in so completely.

BARON. (*aside*) That the Prime Minister should himself be the secret agent.

Enter the DUKE at back, in ball dress and unmasked.

DUKE. (*speaking off, as he enters*) Tell her Highness that she may reckon on me as one of her guests at her *petit souper* to-night.

GENTLEMAN bows and exits.

COUNT. The Duke!

BARON. (*aside*) I am ruined if he detects me with his secret agent.

COUNT. (*aside*) He will never forgive me—trying to penetrate his secrets.

DUKE. (*coming down between them*) Why, my good Count Steinhausen—my dear Lord Chamberlain, what has happened? You look as if you had seen a ghost.

COUNT. (*aside*) He said my good Count Steinhausen—then he is not angry.

BARON. (*aside*) He called me my dear Lord Chamberlain, and I am safe.

COUNT. Nothing extraordinary has occurred, I assure your Highness—has there, Baron?

BARON. Nothing whatever: we met here accidentally, and being both disguised we did not immediately recognise each other—so there was a little surprise, and—

COUNT. And we were laughing—that is, not exactly laughing—were we, Baron?

BARON. Certainly not: we were conversing when his Highness came in.

COUNT. Yes, your Highness, my Lord Chamberlain spoke to me of certain changes in the—the buttery department.

BARON. The buttery department, your Highness!

DUKE. Don't let me interrupt your conference. *Au revoir.* In a quarter of an hour, Count, I wish to speak to you in my private cabinet.

Exit, R.

COUNT. Heaven be praised, he seems to suspect nothing. But how right I was to mistrust the Baron.

BARON. (aside) I shall never recover this fright. That treacherous Count. (*the COUNT and BARON are both going out at the back, each stops and bows, to allow the other to proceed*)

BARON. After your Excellency.

COUNT. I must entreat—I know too well what I owe to you.

BARON. I am at home here—your Excellency must take the precedence.

COUNT. I insist, Baron.

BARON. Could not think of it, my dear Count.

After many bows, and much gesticulation, they settle the point by taking each other's arm and going off through upper saloon, L.

Re-enter DUKE from his private apartment, R.—he wears a domino and mask as before; his Valet, ROBERT, follows him.

DUKE. Are my sword and pistols on my dressing table?

ROBERT. They are, your Highness.

DUKE. Be ready, then, if I should require them.

ROBERT bows and exits, R.

So I find Count Oscar is seeking for the secret agent to challenge him. Ah, here he comes.

Enter COUNT OSCAR, C. L., looking as if in search of some person.

OSCAR. Ah, at last I have found him. (*crosses to DUKE and touches him on the shoulder*) Sir, I believe I am not mistaken—you danced just now with Mademoiselle Ernestine. (*the DUKE bows*) And I understand you pretend to an interest in that young lady's heart?

DUKE. I am proud to acknowledge, it, sir,

OSCAR. There's a slight difficulty though in your way.

DUKE. Indeed.

OSCAR. Yes, I'm the difficulty—Count Oscar. You'll have to resign the lady or fight me.

DUKE. I accept the alternative with pleasure.

OSCAR. (aside) 'Pon my life, that fellow takes the matter with inimitable *sang froid*; perhaps you are not aware that I had the reputation of being the best swordsman in Paris last season?

DUKE. I am well acquainted with Count Oscar's accomplishments.

OSCAR. And you don't object to deciding our difference with the sword?

DUKE. On the contrary, I prefer it; it is my favorite weapon.

OSCAR. The doose it is! Well I've given you fair warning, and now I have to request that you will unmask, that I may know my antagonist?

DUKE. Impossible! As the Duke's secret agent I am privileged to maintain my incognito at this Court.

OSCAR. As you please, but you understand it is necessary in affairs of this kind to declare your name and rank, before we can proceed further.

DUKE. Name and rank—what have they to do in a struggle between man and man, where life and death are on the issue? But content you, Count Oscar, the Duke has publicly declared that I am his friend, and therefore a gentleman whom it will not disgrace you to meet.

OSCAR. Inscrutable being! I am perfectly satisfied; name your time and place.

DUKE. In five minutes, at the statue of Diana, in the park.

OSCAR. At the statue of Diana;—and by the clear light of the chaste goddess I will have the honor of crossing swords with the secret agent.

COUNT OSCAR bows and exits at back, r., the DUKE exits into his private apartment, r., calling "Robert."

Enter NETTCHEN, l., and looks round.

NETT. How I should like to have seen the faces of the Count and the Baron, when they discovered each other. Oh, it must have been droll beyond everything! I wonder whether they came to a mutual explanation, or—hush—the Count is coming this way with the Duchess, and by her agitation they are speaking on some important matter. I wish I could hear what they are saying—I don't like playing the eaves-dropper, unless I expect to hear something worth listening to, and this flower-stand seems so temptingly placed here for concealment, that I—oh, dear, here they are. (*runs behind a stand bearing a large china vase, in which a flowering shrub grows, r. u. e.*)

Enter the DUCHESS and COUNT from saloon, l.

DUCH. What you tell me, Count, horrifies me. Our Grand Chamberlain to have acted so base, so ungrateful a part is almost incredible.

COUNT. Nevertheless, your Highness, there cannot be a shadow of doubt about his guilt. I became aware of it in a very singular manner, and took my measures accordingly. This ridiculous costume, in which, like Hercules, I concealed a mighty purpose, afforded me an opportunity for detecting the traitor, and identifying him as the secret agent.

DUCH. This treachery I did not expect, it has shaken me to the very soul. Whom can one trust after this? He whom I honored with my whole confidence, who knew all my plans—deserts me and wounds me where I was most vulnerable. Every thing is now explained; he alone was in a position to betray our secrets to the Duke, since he alone was fully acquainted with them.

COUNT. A terrible business, your Highness.

DUCH. A man upon whom I heaped unbounded favors, to be the secret agent of my son.

COUNT. Frightful!

DUCH. On you, Count, alone I can now depend. Advise me how to act in this emergency.

COUNT. It seems to me, your Highness, that the first step is to get rid of my Lord Chamberlain.

DUCH. Nothing could afford me greater pleasure, but how is it to be done?

COUNT. The simplest way in the world, send him quietly to the fortress of Spilsberg, this very night.

DUCH. To the state prison?

COUNT. Precisely, your Highness. The air of the fortress is highly recommended for Court patients.

DUCH. But the Duke will be enraged if we offer such an indignity to his secret agent.

COUNT. Your Highness must remember that this secret agent is a myth, an unsubstantial being, of whom you are supposed to know nothing—so that the fact of your taking a material guarantee for the safe keeping of the body of the Baron Standbach, cannot give offence to the Duke.

DUCH. Ingeniously argued. Count, I will take your advice, the Baron shall try the air of Spilsberg, and it will be easy to invent some excuse for his sudden departure from the Court.

COUNT. Nothing easier, your Highness, a little scandal set afloat about his being seen in a close carriage with a lady on the road to Paris, will effectually turn public curiosity in a wrong channel.

DUCH. If I can only manage to separate him from the Duke for a few days, the projects upon which I have set my heart will be accomplished, you will therefore take measures for his arrest to-night?

COUNT. It shall be done as your Highness directs. Luckily I have in my portfolio some blank warrants of arrest, signed by the Duke, one never knows when they may be wanted for our friends. I'll go directly and insert the Baron's name in one of them, and place it in the hands of the Captain of the Guard, with directions for its immediate execution.

DUCH. And that there may be no delay I will order my carriage to be in waiting, to carry the prisoner to his destination.

Exit, C. to L.

COUNT. It goes to my heart to injure an old friend, but as one of us must fall, human nature suggests it should be the Baron.

Exit, L.

NETT. (*coming from her concealment*) So, so! here's a nice plot against the unsuspecting Lord Chamberlain, whom I will lose no time in putting on his guard, against his friend, the Prime Minister.

Exit, NETTCHEN, C. to L.

Re-enter DUCHESS, C. from L.

DUCH. The carriage is ordered, and now if this wretched Baron

should escape a duel with Count Oscar, he will inevitably fall into the hands of Count Steinhause, who will not let him slip through his fingers. How he could ever have obtained the influence he seems to possess over the Duke, astonishes me—but that my niece, Ernestine, should have fallen in love with such an old formal piece of clockwork, amazes me beyond everything; however, I suppose there's no accounting for female tastes.

Enter COUNT OSCAR, c. from R., without his sword, his arm is bound with a handkerchief.

Ah, Count Oscar, you are here,—and wounded?

OSCAR. Yes, your Highness, that infernal secret agent.

DUCH. You have seen him then?

OSCAR. And felt him too. (*touching his arm*) He's not a man I believe, but a demon, we fought near the fountain at the statue of Diana, below there, in the park. I thought myself a good swordsman, but at the second pass he whips his steel through my wrist—disarms me—and flings my weapon into the fountain, where it remains an object of extraordinary interest to the gold fish.

DUCH. But you recognised your opponent, you saw his face?

OSCAR. Oh dear no, he insisted on wearing his mask.

DUCH. (*aside*) An additional proof that it was the Baron. Console yourself, my dear Count, for your defeat, I promise you that within an hour the secret agent will be on his way to the fortress of Spilsberg.

OSCAR. He shall have my best wishes for a safe journey, though I shan't desire his speedy return.

DUCH. (*crosses to, l.*) Let me take care of that. But you must have your wound dressed—follow me to my apartment where it shall be looked to.

OSCAR. Your Highness is most condescending.

Exit DUCHESS followed by COUNT, L.

Enter BARON STANDBACH and NETTCHEN, c. from L.

BARON. Oh, impossible! The Prime Minister, though he's base enough for anything, could not think of accusing me to the Duchess of being the secret agent, when he is conscious of being himself that mysterious individual. I know he's a villain, but he can't be so black as that.

NETT. Don't let the goodness of your Excellency's heart mislead you—I repeat, that the Prime Minister has told the Duchess you are the secret agent, the Duchess believes him, and you will be sent this very night for change of air to Spilsberg.

BARON. To Spilsberg—are you certain of that?

NETT. So certain, that Count Steinhause, is at this moment in his cabinet making out a warrant for your arrest, which will be immediately placed in the hands of the Captain of the Guard.

BARON. Good gracious! (*sinks in a chair on l. of table, r. c.*) What a mass of moral turpitude is this world. What shall I do? The Duchess would not believe my protestations that I am innocent, and if I were to appeal to the Duke, and confess all I know, he

would never forgive me trying to penetrate his secrets! Which-ever way I turn ruin and disgrace stare me in the face. Hah! (starting up) I know a way by which this alarming sacrifice may be prevented. (to NETTCHEN) The order for my arrest has not yet been delivered to the Officer of the Guard?

NETT. Not yet, your Excellency, but you may be sure it will not be long before it comes.

BARON. The destiny of empires has been changed in five minutes, why may not the fate of a Grand Chamberlain be decided in that time. Nettchen, fetch me pen, ink, and paper directly.

NETT. In a moment, your Excellency. *Exit hastily, L.*

BARON. (at table) Now for a master stroke of diplomacy which shall turn the tables on that perfidious Prime Minister, who has accused me to the Duchess of the treachery of which he is himself guilty. Since he has thrown the odium of being the Duke's secret agent upon me, I'll try if I can't employ a little of his authority. It's a daring deed, but it's the only way I can think of to avoid the blow the Count has aimed at me.

Enter NETTCHEN, L., with writing materials—she places them on the table before him, R. C.

NETT. Here they are, your Excellency.

BARON. Now to have at you, Count. (writes) "To the Captain of the Guard.—Captain, you are hereby directed to immediately arrest the Senora Jacinta Leonora Dolores Maracanzas, who is amongst the company at the Duchess's masked ball to-night. This must be effected as quietly as possible. You are then to place her in a carriage which will be in waiting for you at the palace gate, and convey her without delay to the fortress of Spilsberg. (Signed) The Secret Agent. P.S.—" I owe the Count a special favour for his kind intentions towards me. (writes and reads) "The Senora's physical strength being great, and her temper violent, it will be proper to bring both down by a bread and water diet." (folds the paper and directs it)

NETT. Your Excellency, I see the Count coming this way.

BARON. Good gracious, he's coming to have me arrested! I shall be late. Nettchen, take this paper to Captain Piffaffenheim. Fly, good girl, and tell him the person he wants is here. (gives her paper)

NETT. Here, your Excellency?

BARON. Here—on this spot—you can direct him to it.

NETT. Oh, certainly, your Excellency. *Exit NETTCHEN, C. to L.*

BARON. (looks off at back) Nettchen's information was right: the carriage has just entered the courtyard in which it was intended I should have the honour of travelling to Spilsberg; but, if my plan don't fail, it may carry a more accomplished rascal to that calm retreat.

Enter COUNT, L., still in a Spanish Dancer's dress—he carries a paper in his hand.

COUNT. (aside) The Baron here: (puts paper hastily in his

pocket) If I could find the Captain now how discreetly the business could be managed.

BARON. What was that paper he concealed so hastily? The warrant for my arrest—I feel an instinctive conviction that it must be so.

COUNT. (aside) Where can this Captain be? Such a splendid opportunity may never again offer,—I must go and seek him.

BARON. Ah, Count—Count, is it you? How have you enjoyed the ball?

COUNT. Never was more delighted in my life. And you, my dear Baron, how have you been entertained?

BARON. Wonderfully. Faust's familiar demon never penetrated through so many human masks as I have done to-night.

COUNT. And what have you discovered by your investigation?

BARON. I have discovered age where I expected to find youth—deformity where I hoped for beauty—and falsehood where I looked for truth.

COUNT. Good. Ha, ha, ha! (aside) Can he suspect. Why, Baron, 'tis the way of the world—the way of the world: we've all of us little corner cupboards in our hearts that we don't unlock every day.

BARON. The contents would not always bear inspection, Count.

COUNT. But there are friends to whom we can open our bosoms unreservedly. (aside) Confound the Captain—if he were here now.

Enter CAPTAIN PIFFPAFFENHEIM and NETTCHEN, c. from L., they are followed by four SOLDIERS.

NETT. (pointing to COUNT and BARON) There!

CAPT. Right.

COUNT. Friends whom we can admire, esteem, and love.

BARON. As we do each other, Count.

CAPT. (coming down, L.) Senorita Jacinta Leonora Dolores Maracanzas.

COUNT. Hey! Ah, Captain, you are the very person I was—

CAPT. Silence, Senora. (makes a sign to the SOLDIERS, who surround him)

COUNT. But, Captain, I'm not—

CAPT. Silence, Senora!

COUNT. Allow me to say—

CAPT. Silence—March!

The COUNT is marched off by the SOLDIERS, c. to R.—the warrant drops from the COUNT's pocket—the BARON picks it up, and waves it with a triumphant gesture.

BARON. To Spilsberg! Ha, ha, ha! The poor Count! I'll go on the balcony, to see him start on his journey. (the BARON goes to the balcony at back)

NETT. And I'll go and tell my husband, who will inform the Duke of this little affair.

Exit, R.

Enter DUCHESS, c. from L.

DUCH. I wonder has the Count succeeded in arresting the traitor?

(*a carriage is heard rolling away, R. U. E.*) Hark ! there—I hear the carriage leaving the court yard—they have got the traitor then, and I shall never see his detestable face again.

Enter OSCAR, L.

Congratulate me, my dear Count Oscar, and felicitate yourself, for your rival and my enemy is now on his way to Spilsberg.

OSCAR. My rival ! Your Highness, doubtless alludes to—

Re-enter BARON from balcony, and comes down.

BARON. Victoria ! He's off—he's off ! (*checks himself on seeing DUCHESS, who turns quickly and perceiving the BARON utters a slight scream*)

DUCH. (*crosses to c.*) Ah, Baron, you here ! I thought that—where's Count Steinhausen ?

BARON. (*coldly*) I this moment, your Highness, observed him stepping into a carriage with Captain Piffaffenheim, which drove rapidly out of the court yard.

DUCH. Good heavens ! There has been a dreadful mistake here—the poor Count has been arrested for another person.

BARON. How exceedingly awkward for the Count—may I enquire your Highness, for whom he has been taken.

DUCH. For a fellow who deserves hanging.

BARON. In my opinion, then, they have found the right man.

DUCH. (*losing her self-command*) For a mean, worthless, treacherous spy for yourself, Baron, if you must know.

BARON. Your Highness paralyses me.

DUCH. I know you now, Baron, and wish to hold no further communication with the secret agent of the Duke.

OSCAR. (*aside*) My masked antagonist.

BARON. Will your Highness suffer me to speak ? (*he produces the warrant*) This warrant for consigning me to the pleasant retirement of the State prison, countersigned by the Count, speaks sufficiently for his friendship for me : to your Highness he has been more treacherous still.

DUCH. Treacherous to me ? Explain yourself.

BARON. Painful though it be, the monstrous fact must be told—Count Steinhausen is himself the secret agent !

DUCH. The Count ?—Impossible !

OSCAR. My uncle ?—Absurd !

BARON. It is, nevertheless, true. I discovered his treachery by a curious stratagem—detected him ; in fact, brought it home to him, so that he could not deny it.

OSCAR. But the secret agent is attached to Mademoiselle Ernestine.

BARON. That's the horror of it : the uncle loves his nephew's affianced bride.

DUCH. Shocking ! shocking !

OSCAR. This accounts for his refusing to unmask, when we fought this evening.

BARON. And for his trying to bury his secret with me in the

dungeons of Spilsberg. It's really frightful to think of some men's duplicity.

Enter the DUKE, c. from R., unmasked, speaking as he enters.

DUKE. (r. c.) Such an atrocious stratagem was never imagined—so daring an attempt!

DUCH. (l. c.) What is it my son?

DUKE. Our prime minister, madam, was arrested to-night, here in the Palace, upon a forged order, purporting to have been written by our secret agent.

BARON. (*aside*) How did he learn that?

DUCH. Purporting to have been written by—

DUKE. My secret agent.

DUCH. And who informed you of it?

DUKE. My secret agent, of course.

DUCH. Your sec—then Count Steinhausen is not—oh, I'm bewildered.

BARON. (l., *aside*) He knows all—I'm ruined; I feel my heart no bigger than a pea in my bosom.

DUCH. (*aside*) The mystery becomes deeper every hour. Has the Count then been sent to prison?

DUKE. No; for I was informed of his false arrest almost at the moment it took place. (*aside*) Robert's little wife performed that service for me. (*to DUCHESS*) And I immediately sent a courier after the carriage, with my order to return with the Count on the instant. I expect him every moment. (*goes to back and looks off*)

DUCH. (*apart to BARON*) You have deceived me, Baron.

BARON. (*apart to DUCHESS*) I protest, your Highness, I spoke the truth according to my poor ability; but I'm in an inextricable labyrinth—this secret agent has bewitched us all.

DUCH. I can bear it no longer. This perplexing enigma must be solved at any cost. (*she motions to the BARON and OSCAR, who retire up as DUKE comes down*) My dear Victor, the complications and misunderstandings which have disturbed this once tranquil Court, since this person, whom you call your secret agent, came among us, compels me to speak my mind. Before his arrival you were kind and dutiful, Victor; (*affected*) but since his evil suggestions took possession of your mind, your affection for me has ceased.

DUKE. (*earnestly*) You wrong me, mother, indeed you do.

DUCH. It is true, I am but a feeble woman, with a constitution broken by sixteen years' toil for your benefit; (*weeping*) I feel I am worn out, and that it is better I should retire, and make way for—your secret agent. To-morrow, Victor, I will quit the Palace, for my quiet little villa in the country.

DUKE. (*moved*) No; I cannot permit that. (*to DUCHESS*) Is there no way, dear mother, by which a treaty of peace may be made, on conditions acceptable to all parties?

DUCH. With the secret agent?—Never!

DUKE. I do not ask it; I propose that this objectionable personage shall quit the Court.

DUCH. (*with sudden interest*) Ah!

DUKE. On condition that you break off my projected marriage with the Princess Amelia of Brunswick.

DUCH. Why, I understood you to be delighted with the alliance.

DUKE. It is possible I may have changed my mind, ha, ha, ha ! It is so strange that our sex should sometimes imitate the fickleness of yours.

DUCH. Then you are determined not to marry the Princess.

DUKE. Inflexibly.

DUCH. Well, it will be a difficult matter, but if you insist, it must be done ; I accept your proposition, Victor—the match shall be broken off.

DUKE. And my secret agent shall quit the Court this night ; I now go to prepare him for his departure.

DUCH. That point is gained.

DUKE goes into his apartment, R.

Exit, L.

Enter ERNESTINE from saloon, L.

ERNEST. At last I have escaped from the annoying attentions of Count Oscar.

Re-enter the DUKE, R.

Victor ! (crosses hastily to him)

DUKE. Dearest Ernestine—(kisses her hand)—our plot works famously : my mother has consented to break off the Brunswick match on condition of my sending away my secret agent ; but we have still to think how I may quietly get rid of the ministry.

ERNEST. I think I have a plan which will bring about what you want. Has the Count Steinhausen returned yet from his trip to Spilsberg ?

DUKE. I imagine he has—yes, I perceive him coming this way.

ERNEST. Well, you go and take your station yonder, (pointing to inner saloon) where you can observe all that passes during my interview with the Count ; and when I drop my handkerchief you must manage that the Duchess, Count Oscar, and their party shall enter and surprise us.

DUKE. I don't know what you design, but I will obey you implicitly.

Goes into saloon and exit, L.

Enter COUNT STEINHAUSEN, L., in his proper dress.

COUNT. Who could be the author of the daring attempt to incarcerate a Prime Minister ? I suspect Baron Stanbach ; he's the Duke's secret agent, and therefore the most likely person to desire to put me quietly out of the way. But in that case why should the Duke have interfered to liberate me ? The whole affair is a mystery that I cannot penetrate : but the world shall hear of the insult which has been offered to me. All Europe will be convulsed when it hears that a Prime Minister has been kidnapped by nobody knows who.

ERNEST. Ah, Count, I have been anxiously seeking for you.

COUNT. To be an object of anxiety to a fair lady is an honour I feel profoundly, mademoiselle. (bows—aside) That's rather *comme il faut* !

ERNEST. I come, Count, to——are we alone?

COUNT. Perfectly, mademoiselle.

The DUKE reappears watching in the inner saloon.

(aside) More mystery.

ERNEST. I come to throw myself on your generosity, your kindness, and your sympathy.

COUNT. (aside) My sympathy! What does she mean? Certainly, mademoiselle—nothing touches the tender chords of my heart like the voice of lovely woman. (aside) By the way, she is really charming.

ERNEST. You know that I am commanded to bestow my hand on Count Oscar, but it is impossible I can give him my heart.

COUNT. Dear me, this is rather an unpleasant confession for my nephew; but once you are married it won't much matter.

ERNEST. We shall never be married—I would die first.

COUNT. Really I don't know what to say. Could you not contrive to muster ever so little love for my nephew? He's a reasonable young man, and won't require much.

ERNEST. No, no—I tell you 'tis impossible, because——turn away your head, and do not look at me thus with those eyes!

COUNT. (aside) Gracious! What's the matter with my eyes? How do they look? Hah—hah! is it possible that they have been——Psha! I'm a fool? (to ERNEST) Because——

ERNEST. Because I love another.

COUNT. (aside) She loves another. I feel an unaccountable sensation creeping through me—Mademoiselle Ernestine, may I ask the name of the favored mortal upon whom you have placed your affections.

ERNEST. No—no, not for worlds, to you, above all others, I dare not breathe his name.

COUNT. (aside) Powers of love! How beautiful she looks. Is the man you have chosen attached to the Court, mademoiselle?

ERNEST. Yes, he holds a distinguished position in it.

COUNT. One question more, mademoiselle, have you lately beheld the object of your tenderness?

ERNEST. I tremble to answer you, but—his eyes are now bent upon me.

COUNT. Rapturous confession! (aside) Poor Oscar, I did all I could for him—but all-conquering love must be obeyed. (drops on his knees before ERNESTINE) Behold me, adorable Ernestine, at your feet, eager to respond to the passion that inflames your bosom.

He takes her hand, ERNESTINE drops her handkerchief, and the DUKE beckons to the DUCHESS and her party to approach. The DUCHESS, BARON STANDBACH, COUNT OSCAR, and COURT LADIES and GENTLEMEN, preceded by the DUKE, enter from the further saloon, c.; all but the DUKE express astonishment by their gestures on perceiving the COUNT.

COUNT. Tell me that you adore me, and assure me that I am——
(sees the others and stops confounded)

Exit DUKE laughing, r.

DUCH. Discovered!

OSCAR. Unmasked!

COUNT. (*rising*) Ruined!

DUCH. Begone, base man! I loathe the sight of a traitor. (*aside*)

My resolution is taken. (*she sits at table, r. c., and writes*)

OSCAR. You have played a doosed deep game, uncle, but the last card is not yet out; depend upon it I shall not forget what I owe you, while I bear the mark of this wound I received from your sword to remind me of you.

COUNT. From my sword? The most peaceable weapon that ever slept in a scabbard.

BARON. Of course he'll deny it as he denies everything. I suppose, Count, you'll say next you're not the secret agent?

COUNT. Really, Baron, this is going a little too far, when you know *you* are the secret agent.

BARON. Me? There are proofs, Count—

COUNT. That you are the person.

BARON. Would you dare to assert—

COUNT. Have you the assurance to deny—

BARON. That it is you.

COUNT. No, you!

BARON. You!

COUNT. You!

DUCH. (*coming between them*) Cease this contest, gentlemen, the matter is settled by this letter which I have addressed to the Duke.

Enter ROBERT, r.

Where is the Duke?

ROBERT. In his cabinet, your Highness.

Enter NETTCHEN, r.

Where he is at this moment, engaged with his secret agent. (*general astonishment*)

BARON. Amazement!

COUNT. How many secret agents are there at Court?

Enter DUKE, r.

DUKE. Not one now, Count—the last left the palace this moment.

BARON. Heaven be praised!

DUCH. My dear Victor, read this paper which I have just written. (*gives paper*)

DUCH. (*reads*) "My dear son, upon due consideration, I have resolved to seek repose from the toils of public life, and I give my promise not to interfere henceforward in any state affairs, on the sole condition, that no member of the present ministry shall retain his post. (*The COUNT and BARON totter and cling to each other for support*)

DUKE. (*having glanced over the paper*) Your wishes shall be complied with, dear mother, they are precisely those of my secret agent—who in this paper, the last he addressed to me—says, it is time that these worthy men, who have laboured so long in the service of their country, should be permitted to enjoy an

immunity from official labour. To you, Count, he recommends a liberal pension, and the grand Order of the Golden Ass. (*the COUNT bows*) You, Baron, are to be rewarded with the sinecure place of Director-General of the Water Works. (*BARON bows*) And finally, he advises me to offer my hand to my cousin Ernestine, as my heart has long been in her possession.

DUCH. Ernestine ! my niece !

ERNEST. (*crossing to c.*) Who will be too happy, my dear aunt, if she may change the name of niece, to the nearer one of daughter.

DUCH. Ah, Victor ! this is really to make me happy. I did not dream of your loving Ernestine.

DUKE. (*taking ERNESTINE's hand*) Yet it seems so natural.

NETT. (*aside*) And so remarkably pleasant !

OSCAR. (*aside*) Doosed awkward though ! I really was not aware that I had the honour of being your Highness's rival : but your Highness has nothing to fear—I shall return to-morrow to Paris, where I shall be received with open arms—(*aside*)—by my creditors.

BARON. (*apart*) Director-General of the Water Works !

COUNT. I beg your Highness's pardon ; —Mademoiselle Ernestine —hem—is there not some slight mistake here ?

DUKE. Certainly, Count—but this mistake has been altogether on your side.

COUNT. Quite satisfactory, your Highness. (*apart*) I feel conscious of having merited the distinguished honour of bearing the Order of the Golden Ass.

Enter SERVANT, l., with letter on salver, which he presents to COUNT.
Hey ! Well now, what is it ? Don't interrupt me : I can't receive any letters at such a critical moment.

MESSENGER. I thought, sir, as 'twas from the secret agent—

COUNT. The secret agent—what does he want now ? (*takes letter and opens it hastily*)

Exit SERVANT,, U. E. L.

Ha, ha—what's this ? (*reads*) "Epilogue by the secret agent." (*to audience*) You see he means to have the last word—

BARON. That proves she's a woman. Go on, Count.

COUNT. Bah ! (*reads*)

"The secret agent's task is done. To-night
Invisible, like Shakspere's trickesy sprite,
To baffle selfish plots has been his sport,
And bring back honesty and truth to Court.
Has he done well ? Then generously give
"THE SECRET AGENT" public leave to live."

ROBERT. NETTCHEN. BARON. COUNT. DUKE. ERNEST. DUCHESS.

Curtain.