

THE
PRIMA DONNA.

A Comedy.

IN TWO ACTS.

BY

DION BOUCICAULT,

AUTHOR OF

"London Assurance," "Old Heads and Young Hearts,"
"Love in a Maze," &c. &c. &c.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

I HAD been often told by my literary friends, that the sentimental Comedies, so popular at the *Gymnase Theatre* in Paris, were unsuited to the taste of a London Public. In spite of this opinion, I wrote "THE PRIMA DONNA." I think I may conscientiously say, that I offered it to every manager in London, by whom it was particularly admired, and returned to me with thanks.

At last I induced Mr. Kean to allow me to read it to him; he accepted it at once, and pronounced his faith in its success: (although I must do him the justice to say I read him to sleep).

The question, then, is settled, and the London Public will accept this class of Drama; and what is more, we have artists who can render it with spirit and finesse.

Some six months ago, I went to the Soho Theatre to witness some Amateur Theatricals. I saw there a young lady, in whose performance I detected so much excellence, that I told her so. I gave the same opinion to Mr. Kean, who having satisfied himself that I was right, instantly engaged her; and any reader who may wish to share this opinion may do so, as this lady, Miss HEATH, made her *début* in "THE PRIMA DONNA."

On the character of Margaret in this piece, I had lavished all my care: there was at once my only hope and only fear, the character was dangerous and difficult. It was realized by Miss ROBERTSON, with so deep a sense of its tenderness, with so much elegance and poetry, that I congratulated myself that every manager in London had refused the Comedy, since to that fact I owe the admiration bestowed on her performance.

DION BOUCICAULT.

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*First performed at the Royal Princess's Theatre,
on Saturday, September 18th, 1852.*

Characters.

| | | | | |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| STELLA ... | ... | ... | ... | MISS HEATH. |
| MARGARET ... | ... | ... | ... | MISS ROBERTSON. |
| ROUBLE... | ... | ... | ... | MR. WALTER LACEY. |
| ERIC ... | ... | ... | ... | MR. CATHCART. |
| HOLBEIN... | ... | ... | ... | MR. ADDISON. |

* * The Scene is laid in Switzerland during the First Act.
And in Milan during the Second.

Time in Representation—1 hour and 15 minutes.

Costumes.

MARGARET.—*First dress*, white muslin wrapper. *Second dress*, neat Swiss dress, green silk skirt, white chemisette, black velvet open Swiss body.

STELLA.—*First dress*, lilac silk travelling dress, white bonnet, and cashmere shawl. *Second dress*, white silk morning dress.

ERIC.—Austrian uniform, cap, short white frock coat, and blue trowsers with scarlet stripe down side, sword, and cap.

HOLBEIN.—*First dress*, grey hair, black body coat, waistcoat, breeches, and stockings. *Second dress*, brown coat, and scarlet spencer.

ROUBLE.—*First dress*, grey overcoat, or wrapper, black trowsers, and black gloves. *Second dress*, bottle green full-skirted French body coat, gilt buttons, light long waistcoat, hat, and cane.

THE PRIMA DONNA.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*An Apartment in Holbein's House; a door at the back opens on the Lazon. Table and chair, l., on the right a sofa, and a sofa table, tastefully arranged with books, flowers, and a French clock. Fire-place r., doors l. 2 e. and c.*

Enter STELLA, followed by ROUBLE, both in travelling costume, c. from l.
STEL. Mr. Rouble, you compel me to tell you, that you pass all candourance.

ROU. I am prepared for all you can say.

STEL. When I quitted Milan so suddenly, under an assumed name, delicacy might have suggested to you, that I desired to travel alone.

ROU. Ah, Signora! the idea of your travelling alone—you who are besieged by lovers.

STEL. Sir!

ROU. Oh, in the most honourable sense of the word, reproach has never looked upon you—no—amongst the roses that have strewn your path there has been no thorn.

STEL. Pardon me, I feel one now.

ROU. (*bowing*) Eh? Oh! thank you—you, the Prima Donna, who have turned Milan into a lunatic asylum—the syren, on whose notes the intrigues of courts and the calculations of commerce have hung suspended—you, whose actions are the business and livelihood of a hundred spies.

STEL. Spies!

ROU. I have kept a dozen myself in constant pay.

STEL. And you have the assurance to confess it?

ROU. Could I otherwise have discovered your intention to quit Milan?

STEL. And you followed me?

ROU. No, I preceded you—I ordered your relays of horses, and stimulated the heels of the postillions.

STEL. Then it was to you I owed my fright and that fearful speed in spite of my entreaties, when, at every instant, I expected my carriage would have been dashed to pieces.

ROU. Oh, I wish it had!

STEL. How?

ROU. Then you must have accepted mine.

STEL. I beg, sir, that this folly may end, and that you will inform me what insane project animates your pursuit—what brings you here? (*she takes off her bonnet and shawl, gloves, ROUBLE assists her, and subsequently manages to secrete one of the gloves*)

ROU. To see you—since your footmen and your principles deny me your door; but I solace my love with the knowledge that you distribute misery alike to all your adorers. In my quality of Court Jeweller, I know the amount of diamonds purchased for and refused by you; and in my capacity of banker, I calculated the settlements you have disdained—my admiration mounted with the sum total, until—

STEL. Mr. Rouble, one word—I can guess your errand. I am an actress—as such, I know I am defenceless, and the offer you would blush to make another you deem an honour to me; but I appeal to your generosity—this is my father's house—my home. (*crosses, R.*) Now, go on. (*sits down*)

ROU. (*pauses*) Signora! had my father taught me more than my trade, I might have been spared your reproach—pardon me if I turn the phrase badly—I am neither elegant nor handsome, I know it; nor have I wit or talent; and therefore I seek for all these qualities in a wife, and have found them in you.

STEL. Your wife!

ROU. I offer you my fortune and my hand. (*she turns*) I trust the one will excuse the other.

STEL. Mr. Rouble, (*pause—rises*) I thank you. (*gives him her hand*) It may be that you are neither handsome, elegant, talented, or witty, but your heart is a good one.

ROU. Or would I offer it to you?

STEL. And it is in the right place.

ROU. Being in your possession.

STEL. If compelled to decline the offer, you deserve that I should afford you my reason.

ROU. Having deprived me of mine, it is but restitution.

STEL. I am an orphan—a foundling, without a name.

ROU. Accept of mine.

STEL. I never knew my relations. I have none.

ROU. Relations! Is that all? When you marry my fortune, you will find your relations forthwith.

STEL. My earliest recollections picture a poor, famished, ragged child, begging her bread from house to house; singing our Swiss melodies to gain a breakfast. It was on my journey from a neighbouring mountain village to this town that I was overtaken by a snowstorm, in which I had perished, but for timely assistance. I was carried to this house—a fever ensued; and ere I recovered, I was the adopted child of my preserver—the companion of his only daughter.

ROU. Heaven will bless the house that sheltered you.

STEL. You are now in that house; here I have lived my life—loved—caressed—

ROU. Here, (*looks around*) I'll buy the building, if it costs me half my fortune.

STEL. My benefactor was a physician ; but the income he derived from his patients he spent in medicines for the poor—he was verging on ruin, when a means of escape from that calamity suggested itself—my voice, hitherto valued only as a solace to my father, I reflected that it might save us. In a word, I quitted this house as I entered it—on foot. I walked to Milan, where, under the name of Stella, I appeared at the Scala, you know the rest.

ROU. But this does not account for your mysterious elopement ?

STEL. I hastened hither to beg the consent of my only relatives to—to—my marriage.

ROU. With me ? Oh !

STEL. With another ! whom I love.

ROU. You love another ! Impossible ! Where is he ?

STEL. He is here.

ROU. Here ; and might I ask his name ?

STEL. If you did, I should decline to give it.

ROU. I thought so ; but I have his description.

STEL. Indeed !

ROU. Young, elegant, handsome, these lucky lovers are all the same—stereotyped. (*aside*) I will watch the door of this house, and the first fellow that answers the description—oh—they think a tradesman cannot fight—we shall see. (*aloud*) Signora ! I have the honour—(*bows, and makes a movement to withdraw*)

STEL. You are agitated—have I wounded you ?

ROU. No, Signora ! that pleasure is reserved, perhaps, for another. I have the honour—(*bows—retires*)

STEL. Mr. Rouble !

ROU. Signora, you have already made me a fool ; if I remain, you will very probably make me a coward. I have the honour—(*bows, and exits, c. and L.*)

STEL. What a strange creature it is ; and if I can return his sincere love with nothing but pity, 'tis your fault, dear Eric, yours alone. (*the French clock strikes nine*) Nine o'clock, and the house appears asleep—no one risen, for I penetrated unobserved to this room. Ha ! I shall enjoy their surprise—my father and Margaret, dear Margaret. Hush ! I hear a step ! they are coming. (*goes up L. c. playfully, and stands so that when HOLBEIN enters from L., he does not see her ; he is very pale ; walking to the centre, he hesitates a moment, and then advancing to the clock, stops the pendulum. STELLA clasps her hands, and following his movements with a painful transition of countenance*)

STEL. Alone—and how pale !

HOL. (*vacantly*) Why can I not arrest the steps of Time as easily as the pendulum of this clock.

STEL. (*advancing close to him*) My father !

HOL. (*turning*) Stella ! Stella ! (*embraces her*) At last, at last ! Oh ! my child, you arrive too late, why did you not reply to my letters ?

STEL. Your letters ? For three months I have received none !

HOL. And I have written many—many.

STEL. Ah! I see—they were intercepted by order of the Grand Duke.

HOL. My letters intercepted! Wherefore?

STEL. No matter—I will explain: but speak, where is my sister Margaret?

HOL. Margaret—

STEL. You tremble: why do you gaze on me, my father?

HOL. Be—because—soon—very soon—none will call me by that name but you.

STEL. (*whispering terrified*) She—she is ill.

HOL. (*looking slowly towards the clock*) In a few hours I shall be childless—and those hours—(*points to clock*) I could not bear to hear them told. (*the manner and voice of HOLBEIN are very subdued and gentle, indicative of despair*)

STEL. Grief and watching have unnerved you, father; but I am here to share with you. She will live—oh! she must: youth clings hard to life, father—your skill will revive her.

HOL. (*bitterly*) My skill!—oh! my skill! (*he endeavours to control his feelings, sits down by the table, leans his head on his hand, weeping—pause: she follows him*)

STEL. Trust, then, to my love. But tell me what malady has seized her?

HOL. I cannot tell; but about three months ago, a rich English patient of mine, Mrs. Dacre, who remained here under my care, took a great liking to Margaret, and on leaving us invited her to accompany their party to Como: the idea pleased my child, and she left me. After a month's absence she returned—

STEL. In good health?

HOL. Yes—but changed; and from that hour I saw my poor child yielding slowly to some fearful invisible malady—without pain, with a smile always on her livid lip. You appeal to my skill—well! I flew to it—and—do you know its value? It endowed me with the anguish of watching my beautiful, my adored, my only one, wither under my very eyes! It enabled me to calculate the hours of her fleeting life with terrible exactitude.

STEL. And there is no hope?

HOL. None. When she awakes from the stupor in which my art has plunged her, she will exhibit every sign of health, except strength; she will thank heaven for her happiness—and then—she will leave us!

STEL. Lead me to her.

HOL. Stay! I will watch until her eyes unclose, and then she shall know of your arrival.

Exit, l. door.

STEL. My sister dying, and Eric who was to have met me here—

ERIC. (*without*) The Signora Stella!

STEL. 'Tis his voice.

ERIC. (*without*) The Count Eric Mansfeldt!

STEL. Eric!

ERIC. Stella! dearest Stella! have I not faithfully obeyed you?

SERVANT appears at door at back; enter ERIC, c. from L.; SERVANT retires, c. and L.

(embraces her) The preparations for our marriage are complete.

STEL. Hush! Do not speak of our marriage—at least, not now!

ERIC. Stella, reflect that delay is ruin! I have just escaped from the prison to which my father consigned me when he heard of my intention to wed you; my father—an Austrian minister—can pursue me even here into Switzerland, and demand of the Canton to give me up.

STEL. Were my life at stake, I could not leave this house at such a moment. My sister is dying.

ERIC. Dying!

STEL. To speak of love—while she breathes her last! Oh! leave me—leave me, Eric!

ERIC. I will not whisper a word of love—I will not intrude a look upon your sorrows. Oh! I prize every gentle impulse of that heart too much. See—I go—but one word. I have learned that my father, in consequence of my escape from prison, has disinherited me, and petitioned the Emperor to deprive me of my rank and my commission. I will write to him, saying that I expect—I wish for nothing at his hands—not even his consent—

STEL. Write nothing of the kind. Say, that in spite of his injustice we await in hope and submission the moment when he will forgive. But go. (she looks off)

ERIC. May I see you again to-day?

STEL. Yes, bring me the letter!

ERIC. Farewell! (kisses her hand) Farewell!

STEL. They come! 'tis she! (waves her hand to ERIC, who hurries out, c. and L.)

Enter HOLBEIN, leading MARGARET, l. door.

HOL. Gently, gently!

STEL. (advancing to her) Margaret!

MAR. Stella! shall I reproach you with your cruel absence?

HOL. Do—but gently—you promised to be calm.

MAR. You hear how he goes on—always thus—the least emotion on my part terrifies him. One would imagine that I was in some mortal peril.

HOL. Oh—the—the idea!

MAR. Do I look ill, Stella?

STEL. More beautiful than ever.

MAR. And I feel strong—very. (leans on HOLBEIN)

HOL. I said you would wake refreshed.

MAR. Thank heaven I am so—and so happy! (HOLBEIN and STELLA exchange looks).

HOL. You must be fatigued now?

MAR. Fatigued! (to STELLA) You hear him! I am scarcely risen—but I am fatigued—provoking! (sits on the couch, and is attracted by the sight of STELLA's shawl, which ROUBBLE has previously

thrown over the back of the couch) Oh! what a love of a shawl!—Cashmere? (*examines it*)

HOL. (*to STELLA*) Spare her the least emotion; let her dream on. Nurse her delusion. (*crosses to MARGARET; STELLA goes L.—kissing her*) Farewell!—(*aside*) and it may be the last—it may be—(*aloud*) I shall not be long. (*aside to STELLA*) Remember!

Exit, c. and L.

MAR. Stella! at last we are alone—oh! Stella, how I have longed—longed for this moment! (*embracing her and smiling*) You are the dear Esculapius, who alone could “minister to a mind diseased.”

STEL. Margaret—you are not happy?

MAR. I do not know—but you shall tell me—what I am. Three months ago I visited Como.

STEL. With Mrs. Dacre—I heard so.

MAR. We were staying in a large hotel, built on the very verge of the lovely lake. One night, after we had retired to rest, I was roused from sleep by a dreadful sensation of oppression, the room was filled with a dense smoke—confused cries, mingled with the roar of flame, bewildered my senses. I flew to the window and shrieked for help—I remember the look of the upturned faces of the mob—presently I distinguished an Austrian officer rush from the crowd and plunge into the sea of flame—my senses fled. When I awoke, I found myself in the arms of this stranger—he had saved my life. My first sensation was one of shame—so burning, so bitter, that I almost hated him. The next day he visited Mrs. Dacre; how I received him I cannot tell; he left us—

STEL. You have not seen him since?

MAR. No; but his noble countenance and gentle voice are never absent from my imagination.

STEL. Your hate turned into love?

MAR. Love! oh, yes—love! but so dreamy, so wild, and so hopeless—fed by my own fancy, it grew and grew until it filled my whole existence; it seemed as if I had swallowed a sweet poison that gave me power to assemble all the days of my life—their hopes and fears—to mass them into one confusion, and gamble them away!

STEL. Be calm!

MAR. Oh! Stella—see—to speak of him revives me!

STEL. It does—then tell me, have you not even heard of him since then?

MAR. No; I fear my manner so discouraged him, and yet he might have known—do not laugh at my folly, Stella, when I tell you the mad hope which animates me—Each day I expect him to appear before me—I know not how—and each day sees that hope expire,—but only to be renewed by the visions of the night!

Enter ERIC, with a letter in his hand, c. from L., down L.

I imagine even now that he has discovered my name—my retreat—(*becoming excited*) that he will appear before me—here—as in my dreams, and pour out his love at my feet, and claim me! (*sees ERIC*)

and utters a stifled exclamation; rises, and fixes a look of extacy on him, then raises her arm and points) He! (*she endeavours to articulate, but falls on the sofa, r. c.*)

STEL. Margaret! my sister!—she faints! (*she hurriedly searches for her fan, with which she endeavours to revive her*) Oh! why did you come?

ERIC. You desired to see this letter.

STEL. Not now—not now! Leave it.

(ERIC places the letter on the table)

STEL. Await me there! (*points to door, l.—exit ERIC*) She revives—she breathes—Margaret!

MAR. (*reviving*) Oh, what joy!—my life!—I feel it here again—(*places her hand on her heart*) it rushes back—free—free—

STEL. My sister—dearest—be calm!

MAR. (*raising herself*) I saw him—I saw him—there!

STEL. Whom?

MAR. My preserver—him!

STEL. Heaven!

MAR. Did not you see? He came in at that door—a letter was in his hands.

STEL. (*aside*) Eric!

MAR. Where—where is he? Speak! 'Twas not my disordered brain?—say it was not! (*looks round and sees letter on the table*) No, no—'twas true: see the letter on the table—he left it—ah!

(she rises, and with faltering steps attempts to reach the table)

STEL. Margaret! (*interposing her arm; MARGARET availing herself of STELLA's arm for support, reaches the table; seizes the letter, and then falls from weakness on her knees, clasping the letter to her breast with childish glee*)

MAR. I have it—ha, ha! I have it!

STEL. (*aside*) I am lost.

MAR. Let me read and then die—let me read! (*opens letter and looks at it*) I cannot—I no—nothing—a cloud passes over my sight.

STEL. Let me read!

MAR. Do—yes—quick—there—(*gives STELLA the letter*)

STEL. (*aside*) Heaven inspire me!

MAR. Now, now!

STEL. A moment to—to—the writing is—is strange to me.

MAR. How tedious you are!

STEL. (*appears to peruse the letter, but by her manner intimating that she is inventing what she pretends to read*) "Since the hour—when fortune enabled me to save a life,—which has since proved so—precious to me—I have loved you—"

MAR. He loves—he loves me!

STEL. (*still pretending to read*) "If I have not till now pleaded my passion, it was that your manner so discouraged me—I dared not risk the confession—"

MAR. 'Twas that—I said so—did I not?

STEL. "I dared not risk the confession, but unable to endure my misery, I determined to discover your retreat, and to learn my

fate, but until I hear it from your own lips—let this avowal, I beseech you, be a secret from all—Your devoted—”

MAR. Well, well—

STEL. “Eric.”

MAR. (clasping her hands on her heart) Eric!

STEL. Again you faint—your forces abandon you.

MAR. No, Stella, no—they come—they come—flocking round my heart, from which, like the arid rock struck by the prophet’s rod, there gushes out a stream of life! Let me drink deep—deep; I quench the thirst of death.

STEL. You are happy, then?

MAR. Very—very happy! Not as before—but calm—

STEL. My poor Margaret!

Enter HOLBEIN, c. from L.

My father! (tears letter)

MAR. What do you do?

STEL. (aside) He desired it should be a secret—hush! (goes up and throws the fragments into the fire)

MAR. (following her with her eyes) Still—to—to lose it—I wished—(makes a gesture as if she would have kissed it)

HOL. (advancing—aside) I could not conquer my anxiety—(aloud) There is fever on your cheek—you feel an oppression.

MAR. (rising) I do: there is no air here. Let us walk into the garden; I would see the flowers, and feel the sun. (leans on HOLBEIN)

HOL. The fatigue—

MAR. And besides (to STELLA) we may meet him.

HOL. Him—whom?

MAR. Ah! I must not say—it is a secret yet—is it not Stella?

HOL. A secret?

MAR. Yes, father; the secret of my life.

[*Exit HOLBEIN, leading MARGARET out slowly, c. and R.*

STEL. Oh, what fatal—fatal chance has thus entangled my love and hers. Oh, had I not deceived her—had I read the letter, the real one, it would have killed her. No—I have at least cheered the last moments of her existence—she will not live to discover the fraud. (goes to door) Eric!

Enter ERIC, L.

You must instantly escape from this house.

ERIC. Escape!

STEL. Margaret, did you not recognize in her the lady you rescued from the flames of Como?

ERIC. 'Twas she!

STEL. Love for her preserver—for you—has preyed upon her life—this is her malady.

ERIC. Stella, it cannot be.

STEL. It is—she confessed it to me—her rival; her heart has wasted with this passion; she lives but from hour to hour. I chose that her last moments should be happy, and so—so I deceived her. I told her you loved her—she believed me, poor child; and

when I saw her life almost restored—oh, could I have made a dearer sacrifice at that moment, I would not have hesitated—so—go—go—Eric—quit this house—the town—now at once. (*taking his hand*)

ERIC. I cannot.

STEL. (*drops his hand*) You refuse me?

ERIC. I have just received a challenge. (*produces letter*)

STEL. Some paltry foe.

ERIC. Pardon me! it is a name of some value—commercially speaking—Rouble, the banker, at Milan,

STEL. A madman!

ERIC. By an oversight, or a commercial habit, the letter is signed Rouble & Co., but the contents surpass the signature in singularity, (*reads*) "Sir, I have seen you enter the house of Dr. Holbein twice "within the hour; you are young and handsome—I demand satisfaction; for which purpose I beg you will await me, where you are, "for a few minutes.—Your obedient servant, Rouble & Co."

STEL. No address!

ERIC. None.

STEL. He does not know your name—remain, concealed here—he shall be denied admittance.

ERIC. You ask me to remain! remember, should I meet her—

STEL. Ah! I forgot—no—go—go but for my sake.

Enter HOLBEIN and MARGARET, L. C.

Ah! too late. 'Tis she. (*goes up R. round to L. C.*)

HOL. I told you the fatigue would be too much.

MAR. (*seeing ERIC*) Ah!—'tis he!

HOL. What means this strange re-animation? (*sees ERIC*) A stranger! Pardon me, sir—I did not see you. Whom may I have the honour to address?

STEL. The Count Eric, son of the Duke Von Mansfeldt, Austrian Minister at Milan.

Enter ROUBLE, c. from L.

ROU. Many thanks, Signora, for these particulars.

HOL. Sir! This intrusion!

ROU. I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Dr. Holbein.

HOL. The same, sir.

ROU. (R.) Your attendance is required, Dr. Holbein.

HOL. (R. C.) On whom, sir?

ROU. That is impossible to say—but it will be on this gentleman if I have any luck—if not, on me.

HOL. You mean that you wish me to attend a duel about to take place between yourself and Count Eric.

ROU. Your intelligence is equal to your skill. (*bowes*)

MAR. (*who has risen on the word "duel!"*) A duel! What does he mean?

HOL. You see, sir, you alarm my child.

MAR. Father, it must not be!

ROU. Excuse me, madam, he has but one alternative; and that is, to explain to me the motive of his presence here.

ERIC. The tone you assume, sir, precludes any reply but one.

STEL. No, no, I—I will tell you—this gentleman is here in my father's house to claim my sister's hand in marriage. (MARGARET sinks back exhausted on a chair; movement of surprise. ERIC and STELLA exchange looks of confusion)

HOL. Marriage!

STEL. (aside to ERIC) Speak—Eric—oh spare the last hours of my poor dying sister; she will not survive to discover the deceit. Speak, I implore—

ERIC. (L. embarrassed) Dr. Holbein, if the moment be ill chosen, this gentleman must furnish my excuse; and, however strange or sudden the proceeding may appear, I trust my position, more painfully embarrassing than you are aware, will excuse me. Yes, sir—I—I—I came to ask you to bestow on me the hand of your daughter, she permits me (looking at STELLA) to demand it.

HOL. Margaret!

MAR. (embracing HOLBEIN). There is my secret, father.

STEL. (L. c. clasping ERIC's hand aside) Oh, thanks, dear Eric—thanks!

TABLEAU, AND END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE II.—*An elegantly furnished Boudoir in the house of STELLA, at Milan; vases of flowers, pedestals, statues, c. doors, doors R., chimney L., cabinet B. under window, chair, small round table R. C., writing table in front R. C., two chairs, sofa L. C., square table L., with wreaths, bouquets, &c., square table L. under window, two chairs L., four pedestals, two statues, two vases of flowers, square table at back, with clock, candelabra, &c. A SERVANT, in livery, arranging the room.*

Enter ROUBLE, c. doors from L.

ROU. The Signora is not visible! (SERVANT takes hat and stick) True. Last night, she surpassed herself in Norma—she requires rest. (remarks the bouquets and wreaths) All the trophies of her triumphs—there is my wreath. I distinguish my bouquet. (takes up an enormous bouquet) Hum! (looks at his watch) She will not emerge from the arms of Morpheus for an hour. Ah! lucky Morpheus! I wish I was Morpheus. (to the SERVANT) I will leave a note for the Signora. (gives the SERVANT a piece of gold; he arranges writing table quickly) How fond they are of me in this house—all, except—Ah! well! (to the SERVANT) Leave me! [Exit SERVANT C. and L. ROUBLE sits at table R. H., cogitates; then, suddenly, as if struck by an idea] Ah! (writes and repeats) “I re-spect your repose, although you have ruined mine.” (that's neat) “I would have seen you for a moment—perhaps for the last time; for Heaven knows if I should survive an appointment which I have accepted for this morning—see how you have transformed the most pacific of human bankers.” (too true—I have become

a nuisance to society!) "Last night, at the Scala, I sat beside a wretched maniac, who began to criticise your talents, your appearance. I expostulated, he replied, and I threw him over into the pit. This morning we meet; and if I fall, be kind enough to apply, post paid, to Signori Massi and Kaub, my notaries, who hold my will—it bequeaths to you my fortune. Office hours be tween 10 and 4. Your faithful servants, Rouble & Co." (*rings bell, folds and seals letter.*) SERVANT *re-enters down c.*) Listen! you will give this letter to the Signora when she awakes, no—it might give her a disagreeable emotion, place it on the salver, with her chocolate—she takes chocolate? (*SERVANT bows*) then with her chocolate— (*rises, gives another piece of gold; SERVANT brings his hat and stick, takes letter from table, and exit, c.*) That fellow little knows he is likely to lose an excellent customer—farewell, Stella, farewell—no—she comes.

Enter STELLA, followed by MAID, r. 3 e.

STEL. Yes, yes, I will sing at their concert; and stay, on my dressing table you will find a rouleau of gold—send it to them with my best wishes.

MAID. Yes, madam.

[*Exit, r. door.*

ROU. (*advancing, l. c.*) Brava, bravissima!"

STEL. (*impatiently*) Mr. Rouble—already? really this is too bad.

ROU. This concert is for the benefit of the Foundlings; and, in spite of your fatigue, you consent.

STEL. Enough, enough—a foundling myself, I feel as if such unfortunates are my only relatives.

ROU. The concert begins at twelve, if I could only get there in time.

STEL. (*gladly*) You will not be there then?

ROU. An affair of—of importance. (*aside*) Life and death (*aloud*) which may detain me some time.

STEL. I hope so.

ROU. Eh? You hope?

STEL. Now tell me, what good fortune procured me the—the (*impatiently*) pleasure of your early visit?

ROU. First, I wished to see you.

STEL. (*yielding to a comic despair*) Ah! Oh!

ROU. And then to give you news from Switzerland.

STEL. Of my sister—of Margaret?

ROU. My head clerk was obliged to go to Venice last week on business of the house. I desired him to call on his road at Geneva.

STEL. But that is nearly in the opposite direction.

ROU. It is exactly; but I knew you would be glad to hear from home. I saw, when you quitted them, how unwillingly you returned to fulfil your engagement at the Scala—I was delighted.

STEL. Delighted that I was furious. I remember I felt as if I could have done your radiant face a mischief.

ROU. Precisely; it is only when you are out of temper that I engage your attention.

STEL. (*c. smiling*) Poor fellow—'tis true. (*gives him her hand*) Pardon me.

ROU. (*r. c. kissing her hand delighted*) Don't mention it. Yes, when I see you smiling, and wrapped in happy thoughts, I am wretched. I know you are thinking of some handsome rival; but when your eyes flash, and your brow thunders, ah, I am in my element. (*with the supremest satisfaction*) I know you are thinking of me.

STEL. (*stamping*) Mr. Rouble, you are intolerable.

ROU. Ah! you are going to accord me a thought?

STEL. Will you tell me the news of Margaret? You will drive me mad.

ROU. Here it is—her health improved from day to day, and at last she became restored so wonderfully, that the good old docto[r] made a bonfire of his library in commemoration of what he calls his second birthday.

STEL. But—but Count Eric?

ROU. My head clerk says the young Count looks pale and low-spirited.

STEL. (*aside*) Poor Eric—what a situation I left him in.

ROU. Now that your sister is recovered, they wish to fix the happy day.

STEL. The hap—happy—

ROU. Of course; but the young Count's father positively refuses his consent.

STEL. Good—good!

ROU. So the unhappy young man proposes to return to Milan this week. Now I may be of use, for, in my quality of banker, I take a large portion of the new loan—my interest is above par at Court just now. I will speak for the young couple.

STEL. What business is it of yours, I beg to know? (*crossing to r. aside*) It is fated that this man should be my evil genius.

ROU. True, and besides—my appointment. (*looks at his watch*) Eh? I have not one minute to spare. (*goes up—stops*) A word, and I am gone—you remember you told me that I had a rival; well—excuse the candour of my avowal—but I don't believe it.

STEL. No.

ROU. No; for since your return to Milan, no such person has appeared—now, confess, that all this was done to tease me, and that this terrible rival is—

STEL. Whom?

ROU. Myself.

STEL. You!

ROU. Rouble & Co.

STEL. This is too much! Then let me dispel your doubts, since you will assume that air of stupid fatuity. I tell you that this very night I will become the wife of—

ROU. Twenty minutes past, Signora: I tear myself away—but I see—I leave you occupied with my image. Ah, Signora—(*sighs*) I have the honour—

bows reverentially, and Exit c. and L.

STEL. There! (*walks about*) He leaves me now—the only time I

wished him to remain—the provoking wretch. I was just about to bring his castle in the air about those ears I could have boxed for their length. Yet, poor man, his unfortunate love is his only fault. (*sings herself on the sofa, taking up her bouquet*) Oh! if he did not love me, how fond of him I could be! But beside Eric (*throws bouquet away*) all men look so mean—so poor.

ERIC appears at the back.

ERIC. Stella!

STEL. Eric! dear Eric! (*runs to him; they advance together*)

ERIC. (l. c.) Your sister is out of danger.

STEL. (r. c.) I knew it, but not from you. What letters you wrote me! how short—how cold!

ERIC. What could I do? She was there—ever speaking—dreaming of you—leaning over my shoulder as I wrote. Could I have escaped—but no—you—you compelled me to remain.

STEL. I condemned you, my dear Eric, to a sad and wretched time. And now, tell me—when you left—when danger no longer threatened her, and she was able to hear the intelligence—how did you manage to convey it to her.

ERIC. Convey it? I—I—I cannot conceal it—Stella—I had not the courage to make the avowal, and I flew to you for help. When I determined to declare myself, [the image of the old man rose up before me—his pale face and trembling lip—his agony. And Margaret!—to avow to her that for two months I had made her the dupe of an imposture—unwind her arms from round my neck, and thrust her love aside—Stella, I could not do it!

STEL. I have heard of your embarrassment: I alone could understand the painful trial which you endured for my sake.

ERIC. If absent from you, Stella, I was in the presence of your noble deeds. I know all: that you have been the support of your benefactor and his daughter—

STEL. Let us not speak of this, but of yourself. You look pale, dearest!

ERIC. No, no—I am free—now. In that house I could not breathe freely—oh! if I could describe what I suffered—

STEL. I can conceive it. To see that poor girl, and pursue a feigned passion?

ERIC. Yes; a—a—as you say—a feigned—

STEL. To fear lest a word, a look might betray you, and condemn her again to death!

ERIC. And then the confidence—the faith—the simplicity of her love! And her father,—that was almost the worst—his gratitude, his affection, it stifled me. I was his divinity! his prodigy! his son! I had saved his child—

STEL. Eric! you exaggerate. To encourage in pity a love you cannot return, is false feeling.

Enter SERVANT, c. from l., with a salver, cup of chocolate, and the letter on it that ROUBLE wrote—she takes the letter—he places the salver on table and retires)

SERV. This letter, Signora, was left for you by Monsieur Rouble.

STEL. (c.) Well, read ! Have I any secrets from you ? and this, above all. It comes from a lover.

ERIC. (l. c., opens and reads) Ah !

STEL. I told him I was on the point of marriage ; doubtless it is a tirade of reproaches, and the usual ejaculations of despair.

ERIC. No, not one ; he is going to fight with some person who, it appears, insulted you in his estimation ; and in the event of his death, he has bequeathed you his fortune. What a noble fellow—how he must love you ! (gives her the letter)

STEL. Eric ! you seem to advocate his cause.

ERIC. No ; but one cannot help sympathizing with a feeling so noble and sincere.

STEL. Enough of this folly ! My return to Milan, and your continued absence, has appeased the anger of your father. We must take advantage of our temporary security. Every necessary preparation has been made, and our marriage can be privately performed.

ERIC. And we can quit this town—this country for ever !

STEL. You are right, Eric—for her sake.

ERIC. I dare not think of what we have done, and yet to leave them thus !

STEL. How if we write to them ?

ERIC. I would rather write my own death-warrant ! But you—you, Stella—dictate to me. (sits at table, r. c., leans his head on his hand, and appears absorbed in wretchedness)

STEL. (dictating) " Margaret,—If I have deceived you, forgive me ; I would I could love you——"

ERIC. No—not so, I think.

STEL. Well, how would you——

ERIC. Must we say that ? Can't we say that—that——

STEL. What ?

ERIC. Stay !—let me see. (after a moment's pause he writes)

Enter MARGARET, followed by HOLBEIN, c. from l.

HOL. Wait for me, you impatient !

MAR. Stella ! (runs to STELLA)

STEL. (embracing her) 'Tis she ! Dear Margaret ! let me look at you—(embracing her again) dear, dear sister !

HOL. There's a transformation !—a metempsychosis—it is another form. Eh ! that dear child exists against every rule of the therapeutic art ! I don't know how she does it ; but she has made Galen a fool.

MAR. Well !—here we are—here in the room you have so often described to me. (looks round, as removing her bonnet and shawl, she places them on the sofa, l. c.) I feel a sentiment of happiness I cannot explain. (sees ERIC) Ah ! yes, I can explain. Eric ! what ! you have been here all this while, yet never said a word ? Dearest Eric—— (runs to him)

STEL. Margaret !

MAR. What ?

STEL. It is not the custom here in town to speak thus to gentlemen.

MAR. But my lover—my husband—

STEL. Still—in public—

MAR. Very well—in public we will not. (*to ERIC*) Do you know, dearest—(*to STELLA*) We are not in public now, you know—are we?—and when we are alone—

STEL. (*biting her lip*) Alone!

HOL. Ah! see—he was writing to you.

MAR. To me? Oh, let me see it!—his first letter! (*runs to the table and snatches letter*) Let me see! (*reads*) “My own dearest Margaret, (*STELLA starts*) You alone can judge the sincerity of the passion which I have for you; and yet I must tell you”—

STEL. (*slowly turns her eyes on ERIC, who stands in petrified confusion*) What?

MAR. That's all!

ERIC. (R. C.) At that moment you entered, and—

HOL. And spared us a farrago of torments, and vows, and promises, which he can afford you at your leisure. (*they sit on the sofa apart and speak low*) What a picture for an artist, eh? there, that's the way they go on from morning till night.

STEL. (R. C.) Indeed!

HOL. Even when they walked out, it was always to sit in the grotto—you remember, at the farthest end of the garden.

STEL. Rather too far from the house for—for prudence.

HOL. Yes, I told her it would fatigue her, but it did not in the least.

MAR. Oh, Stella, dear! only think of his father refusing his consent to our marriage—Eric is so unhappy about it you can't think. (*to ERIC*) Do you hear, sir? How foolishly you sit there—are you tongued-tied?

HOL. Yes, it is tied in a true lover's knot. He is lost in admiration of your volubility—you talk—talk—talk—it is delightful.

Enter the SERVANT, C. from L.

Your carriage waits, Signora.

STEL. It is the hour of the concert—had I dreamed of your arrival, I would not have engaged myself—but I must leave you, dear Margaret.

MAR. May I not accompany you?

HOL. I forbid it—no—you have scarcely arrived from a long and fatiguing journey. I will go with you, Stella—you, Margaret, will remain.

STEL. Come, dear father—come, Eric.

MAR. No, thank you—since I am condemned to the house, Eric shall remain with me.

HOL. You hear your sentence?

MAR. Thank you for taking away papa.

STEL. (*hastily*) Yes, yes, (*crosses to ERIC, who places her shawl on her shoulders aside*) avail yourself of this moment.

ERIC. (*aside*) How?

STEL. (*aside*) From this hour your imposture becomes unmanly

—for her sake I asked you to deceive—for her sake I now entreat you to confess. (*ERIC makes a gesture of consent*)

HOL. Now, Stella—ah! how proud I feel to walk with you. (*turns and smiles on MARGARET and ERIC*) I say—you lovers—he! he! look at them, Stella, they wish us now at the—mischief, they do. There, we are going, he! he! he!

Exit with STELLA, c. and l.

ERIC. (*passing his hand across his brow*) And now, she must learn to hate me.

MAR. I thought they would never be gone. Oh, dear Eric, what a miserable three days I have passed—how have you endured them?

ERIC. (r. c.) Margaret, listen to me!

MAR. Yes, love—but you need not fatigue your voice with such a distance.

ERIC. (*sitting beside her*) Do you know that every smile you bestow on me is torture—the caress I cannot avoid—seems to be a brand—

MAR. Yes, Eric, I have seen this; while my life was yet in danger, all your thoughts were mine; your eyes met mine, and turned their gaze about my heart—they seemed to lift it up to life. My health returned; and as it came, I saw a grief creep over you—my heaven faded from me—and I regretted my days of suffering when you were all my own.

ERIC. Margaret!

MAR. Confess to me—all—all—nothing is wanting to my happiness but to share a grief with you.

ERIC. You don't know what you ask me; and yet—yet you must know it. I have now to put your love to a sad proof.

MAR. A proof!—go on!

ERIC. If your faith, Margaret, were blinder than your love—your hopes in visions—what would you say?

MAR. (*smiling*) I would say—Eric restore me to the grave from which you rescued me—let me dream on or die.

ERIC. (*hesitating and in great agitation wipes his forehead*) And if this union must bring ruin upon me—

MAR. You! were it so, a very little spot of ground would hide me from you, and the rest of the wide world would never bury your despair—

ERIC. And yet—Oh, heaven, yet—this marriage is impossible! (*he rises*)

MAR. (*rising*) Impossible! You are serious! how impossible—speak—

ERIC. I—I cannot—

MAR. You must.

ERIC. (*hurriedly*) Since my arrival here, I have seen my father—

MAR. Yes—yes.

ERIC. Not only does he refuse his consent to our marriage, but threatens me with every persecution his anger can devise—if I could have shared my fortune with you—

MAR. Is that all—I can teach you to bear poverty—want and I are old friends ; (*smiling*) for years I received him clandestinely in my chamber where he watched my needle ; my father knew nothing of this lover—are you jealous of him? yet then I was alone; but now we are two, two? what do I say, three! you, I, and love (*placing her hands in his*)

ERIC. Love, yes (*passionately*) love irresistible—eternal (*clasps her in his arms and kisses her*)

Enter STELLA, c. from L.

STEL. (R.C.) Eric!

ERIC. Ah!

MAR. 'Tis no one—only Stella—come, sister, and hear this monster—would you believe it; he wanted to persuade me that our marriage was impossible.

STEL. Indeed!

MAR. Yes, and he really would have it so; you never saw such a state as he was in; but I convinced him of his folly (*crosses to STELLA*) could I exist without your love—or yours, Stella, and yet I must confess that once—Oh, I shall never forgive myself—I—I felt—ha! ha!—positively jealous.

STEL. Jealous!

ERIC. Of—of whom?

MAR. (to STELLA) Of you.

STEL. Of me!

MAR. Yes, as you were quitting us. Two months ago when you bade him farewell, I saw you, and you looked on him almost—I thought, that is—almost as I look.

STEL. You—you thought so!

MAR. Yes—and it haunted me so, and then—I said to myself—well, were it so, could I not die, and leave her to love him without remorse (*STELLA and ERIC regard each other in mute despair*)

Enter ROUBLE, his arm in a sling, c. from L.

ROU. (R.) Brava, Signora, bravissima—I was in time for the concert—

MAR. Dear me, Mr. Rouble, what is the matter with your arm?

ROU. Nothing, a—mere—a—I fell down, that is all.

STEL. (R.C.) You are so awkward.

ROU. (aside) Not so very. (*makes a slight gesture, as in fencing*) I have confined him to the house for six weeks. (*aloud*) Ah, Signora, how you sang that Scena.

STEL. Yes; and some unhappy pair of feet would persist in an encore.

ROU. There they are. (*pointing to his feet*)

STEL. 'Twas you, sir—you—always you!

ROU. Yes. I found a difficulty in applauding with one hand, and so— (*makes a gesture of stamping*)

STEL. And I was burning to get back here?

ROU. Yes. I warmed them up—they made you come on four times.

STEL. Are you created to be my tormentor?

ROU. (*to MARGARET and ERIC*) You hear? What an extraordinary being it is—she treats her worshippers worse than Juggernaut treats his.

STEL. Mr. Rouble, have I not begged you to spare me these painful and useless visits?

ROU. Repeatedly; but at this moment it is not exactly to you my presence here is due.

STEL. Indeed! to whom then?

ROU. To the Count Eric.

ERIC. To me?

ROU. I have had an interview with his noble father, and another with the prince. Ah, Signora, he is not so proud as you—he is very glad to see me. I have procured from the Minister this letter.

ERIC. To me. (*takes letter, tears it open, reads hastily*)

MAR. From your father?

ERIC. Ah! can it be—

MAR. What?—what?

ERIC. I will tell you—(*crushes the letter up*)—later.

Enter HOLBEIN, c. from L.

HOL. (r. c.) I cannot believe it—it is quite impossible!

ROU. Oh, my dear sir—many thanks to your stick that seconded my heels.

HOL. Can you believe it? Stella is about to be married.

MAR. Married?

HOL. This very night.

ROU. Sir, I demand satisfaction! No—I forget; 'tis of you Signora, I—no, that is—who—who says so?

HOL. I was at the concert.

ROU. I saw you—and your stick, many thanks.

HOL. Beside me sat a gentleman of clerical appearance, he joined me in exclamations of delight, and I could not help thanking him for his enthusiasm: with tears of gratitude, I said, pardon me, sir, but it is my child—my Stella. I have just arrived this morning. "Ah!" he replied, in a low whisper, "I see, to be present at the marriage this evening." And as I hesitated to understand, he added, "Fear nothing, I am the Abbé Ambrose."

STEL. (*aside*) Destruction!

HOL. "'Tis I who perform the ceremony." Stella, I cried—Stella married! He perceived my looks of astonishment; and seeing he had betrayed himself, he began to applaud violently, and then quitted the room.

MAR. (l. c.) Stella!

ROU. Signora!

STEL. Well, yes—'tis true—I wished it to be a secret.

MAR. From us?—are we, then, strangers to you?

HOL. (*evidently hurt*) Perhaps, dear Stella, we are intruding on you—at this moment—

STEL. Intruding—father—Margaret—I will confess all to you; but—but first, I would ask Eric's advice, ere I reveal a secret which, indeed, is not all my own.

HOL. My dear child, I know that which you do will be right—I seek to know nothing.

STEL. I ask but for a moment—leave me but for a moment, and do not doubt my love.

MAR. Stella, I cannot love and doubt too.

[Exit HOLBEIN and MARGARET, C. and L.]

ROU. And me—what have you to say to me?

STEL. (bowing) I have the honour—

ROU. I believe it gives you pleasure to see the wheel of the idol pass over the body of your wretched adorer—ah! (sighs) Vishnu!

[Exit after HOLBEIN, C. and L.]

STEL. Eric, before I avow this secret to my sister—which, indeed—I have delayed too long—I wish to know the contents of that letter.

ERIC. (L) I entreat you not to ask me.

STEL. (C) What! you have secrets from me, Eric? (*he silently hands her the letter*. *She reads*) "My son, his highness can refuse Mr. Rouble nothing at the present juncture, you have employed a well chosen advocate, we cannot raise the new loan without his assistance, and that help he makes dependent on my consent to your marriage with the daughter of Dr. Holbein," (this man again) "such a connection is not what I hoped for my only son, but too thankful to have escaped the alliance with an actress that lately threatened our family—I suppose I ought to accept the exchange with satisfaction; therefore, I am happy to announce to you that his highness graciously commands you to resume your former offices, and I add my paternal benediction." You see, Eric, I was right to demand this letter—what think you of it?

ERIC. The insult contained in that letter makes my former vows more sacred—more inviolate.

STEL. Dearest Eric—I know the sacrifice you would make, but my pride would revolt at entering a family who scorn and repel me—but, Margaret (*pauses in agitation*) Margaret is—is accepted—you do not love her, I know it—and for my sake—you—you consented to this fatal—no—I mean—this sacrifice—consent, for my sake, to prolong her error—she deserves your love, Eric—(*pauses with increased agitation*) and, besides, she loves you—and—some day, perhaps, this—this feeling in you which is now but a pretence—might become a—a—reality, (*pauses—fixes her eyes on ERIC, who remains immovable*) and you might, who knows, succeed in—that is—you might end in loving—(*pauses, regards him fixedly, then suddenly exclaims*) you do love her—

ERIC. (starting back) I—I—

STEL. You do: or would you have let me say so much, without confounding me with reproaches for the thought? You do love her, Eric—deny it not.

ERIC. Stella, hear me! Was it not you who forced me into the arms of that poor girl, whom I would have fled, until I could not? This rebel passion which you have discovered, and I do confess, I will abjure—destroy—

STEL. (*starting up*) And do you think I would owe my happiness to her death, to your pity, and so deserve your father's curse, and—worse than all—my own contempt? You know me better, Eric! No, no! I yield her to you: and now—the debt of gratitude is paid.

Enter ROUBLE, c. from L.

ROU. (R.) Ah! at last I have discovered you!

ERIC. Sir! What means—

ROU. But you do not carry it off thus, mark you.

ERIC. Speak lower, sir!

ROU. I shall moderate my voice sir, as I please?

Enter MARGARET and HOLBEIN, c. from L.

MAR. What noise is this?

ROU. I have found out the Abbé; he could not resist the sentiments of my esteem. (*puts his hand into his pocket*) I discovered his weak point and the Signora's secret. This very morning he received notice to be here at eight to-night to celebrate her marriage, and he has the names of the parties.

STEL. (*quickly*) All but one—that of the intended—

ROU. Oh, indeed! and you will venture to deny that this very intended is in this room?

STEL. He is in this room.

ROU. It is Count Eric.

MAR. Eric!

STEL. The man is mad—raving mad! Excuse him, dearest, joy has turned his little brains.

ROU. (R.) Oh! then, if not the Count, who then?

STEL. (c., viciously) You!

ROU. Me!

STEL. Yes! You—you—you! Is that plain?

ROU. Oh, oh! I am paralysed.

STEL. If I did not send your names to the Abbé, it was because—because—I did not know them.

ROU. John—Peter—Antony—

STEL. But I did know the man who had defended my name from insult at the peril of his life, and who had bequeathed me his fortune. (*gives MARGARET the letter which ROUBLE wrote to her*) Read, Margaret, read.

ROU. I knew it—it was a moral certainty—I felt my destiny—oh, oh, your husband—I can scarcely believe it.

STEL. But, understand me, I give up nothing—Margaret (*embracing her*) is to be first with me.

ROU. Of course—I come somewhere—third or—eh, very well—very well.

STEL. I will remain on the stage.

ROU. Clearly?

STEL. I will devote to it my whole time and passion.
ROU. I will study music at once.

STEL. I ought to warn you, I have a hundred faults—
ROU. I appreciate them all, and love them.

STEL. But I have a thousand more.

ROU. New blisses to surprise me with? Ah, Signora—

STEL. (*with increasing impatience*) And caprices without number.

ROU. My fortune will satisfy them all.

STEL. (*stamping with impatience*) Ah! it is impossible to hate
that man.

ROU. She is to be my wife, my wi—Oh! (*to HOLBEIN*) My
dear doctor, allow me to congratulate you.

HOL. When is the happy day to be?

ROU. (*to the Public*) To-morrow—let it be to-morrow—do! it
depends on you, consider our feelings, don't disappoint us! Then
let to-morrow publish the reception of a new partner into the firm
of Rouble & Co.

HOLBEIN.
RIGHT.

ROUBLE.

STELLA.

ERIC.

MARGARET.

LEFT.

Curtain.