

Representative Plays by American Dramatists: 1856-1911: Francesca da Rimini eBook

Representative Plays by American Dramatists: 1856-1911: Francesca da Rimini by George Henry Boker

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Title: Representative Plays by American Dramatists: 1856-1911: Francesca da Rimini

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*** Start of this project gutenber EBOOK Francesca da Rimini ***

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FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

A TRAGEDY

Francesca, i tuoi martiri a lagrimar
mi fanno triato e pio.—*Dante*.

Inferno, v. 75 seq.

[Illustration: *George Henry Boker*]

GEORGE HENRY BOKER

(1823-1890)

The name of George Henry Boker suggests a coterie of friendships—a group of men pledged to the pursuit of letters, and worshippers at the shrine of poetry. These men, in the pages of whose published letters and impressions are embedded many pleasing aspects of Boker's temperament and character, were Bayard Taylor, Richard Henry Stoddard, and Charles Godfrey Leland, the latter known familiarly in American literature as "Hans Breitmann." These four, in different periods of their lives, might have been called "the inseparables"—so closely did they watch each other's development, so intently did they await each other's literary output, and write poetry to each other, and meet at Boker's, now and again, for golden talks on Sundays. Poetry was a passion with them, and even when two—Boker and Taylor—were sent abroad on diplomatic missions, they could never have been said to desert the Muse—their literary activity



was merely arrested. One of the four—Stoddard—often felt, in the presence of Boker, a certain reticence due to lack of educational advantages; but in the face of Boker's graciousness—a quality which comes with culture in its truest sense,—he soon found himself writing Boker on matters of style, on qualities of English diction, and on the status of American letters—a stock topic of conversation those days.

Boker was a Philadelphian, born there on October 6, 1823,—the son of Charles S. Boker, a wealthy banker, whose financial expertness weathered the Girard National Bank through the panic years of 1838-40, and whose honour, impugned after his death, in 1857, was defended many years later by his son in "The Book of the Dead," reflective of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," and marked by a triteness of phrase which was always Boker's chief limitation, both as a poet and as a dramatist.

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He was brought up in an atmosphere of ease and refinement, receiving his preparatory education in private schools, and entering Princeton in 1840. On the testimony of Leland, who, being related to Boker, was thrown with him in their early years, and who avows that he always showed a love for the theatre, we learn that the young college student bore that same distinction of manner which had marked him as a child, and was to cling to him as a diplomat. Together as boys, these two would read their "Percy's Reliques," "Don Quixote," Byron and Scott—and while they were both in Princeton, Boker's room possessed the only carpet in the dormitory, and his walls boasted shelves of the handsomest books in college.

"As a mere schoolboy," wrote Leland, "Boker's knowledge of poetry was remarkable. I can remember that he even at nine years of age manifested that wonderful gift that caused him many years after to be characterized by some great actor—I think it was Forrest—as the best reader in America.... While at college ... Shakespeare and Byron were his favourites. He used to quiz me sometimes for my predilections for Wordsworth and Coleridge. We both loved Shelly passionately."

In fact, Leland claims that Boker was given to ridicule the "Lakers;" had he studied them instead, he would have added to his own poetry a naturalness of expression which it lacked.

He was quite the poet of Princeton in his day, quite the gentleman Bohemian. "He was," writes Leland, "quite familiar, in a refined and gentlemanly way, with all the dissipations of Philadelphia and New York." His easy circumstances made it possible for him to balance his ascetic taste for scholarship with riding horse-back. To which almost perfect attainment, he added the skilled ability to box, fence and dance. He graduated from Princeton in 1842, and the description of him left to us by Leland reveals a young man of nineteen, six feet tall, whose sculptured bust, made at this time, was not as much like him "as the ordinary busts of Lord Byron." In later years he was said to bear striking resemblance to Hawthorne. His marriage to Miss Julia Riggs, of Maryland, followed shortly after his graduation, in fact, while he was studying law, a profession which was to serve him in good stead during his diplomatic years, but which he threw over for the stronger pull of poetry, whose Muse he could court without the necessity of driving it hard for support. Yet he was concerned about literature as a paying profession for others. On April 26, 1851, he wrote to Stoddard: "Alas! alas! Dick, is it not sad that an American author cannot live by magazine writing? And this is wholly owing to the want of our international copyright law. Of course it is little to me whether magazine writers get paid or not; but it is so much to you, and to a thousand others." The time, until 1847, was spent in foreign travel, but it is interesting to note, as indication of no mean literary attainment in the interim, that Princeton, during this period, bestowed on him the degree of M.A., for merit in letters.



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1848 was a red-letter year for Boker. It witnessed the publication of his first volume of verse, "The Lessons of Life, and other Poems," and it introduced him to Bayard Taylor and to R.H. Stoddard. Of the occasion, Taylor writes on October 13, to Mary Agnew:

Young Boker, author of the tragedy, "Calaynos," a most remarkable work, is here on a visit, and spent several hours to-night with me. He is another hero,—a most notable, glorious mortal! He is one of our band, and is, I think, destined to high renown as an author. He is nearly my own age, perhaps a year or two older, and he has lived through the same sensations, fought the same fight, and now stands up with the same defiant spirit.

This friendship was one of excellent spiritual sympathy and remarkable external similarities and contrasts. One authority has written of their late years:

In certain ways, he and his friend, Bayard Taylor, made an interesting contrast with each other. Here was Boker [circa 1878] who had just come back from diplomatic service abroad; and here, too, was Taylor, who was just going abroad as minister to Berlin. Both were poets; they were fellow-Pennsylvanians and friends; and they were men of large mould physically, and of impressive presence; yet they were very dissimilar types. Boker, though massive and with a trace of the phlegmatic in his manner (perhaps derived from his Holland ancestors, the Bochers, who had come thither from France, and had then sent a branch into England, from which the American family sprang), was courtly, polished, slightly reserved. His English forefathers had belonged to the Society of Friends, as had also Taylor's family in Pennsylvania,—another point in common. But Taylor's appearance, as his friends will remember, was somewhat bluff and rugged; his manner was hearty and open.

Launched in the literary life, therefore, Boker began to write assiduously. "Calaynos," the tragedy referred to by Taylor, went into two editions during 1848, and the following year was played by Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, May 10. From the New York *Tribune* office, on May 29, 1849, Taylor wrote:

Your welcome letter came this morning, and from the bottom of my heart was I rejoiced by it. I can well imagine your feeling of triumph at this earnest of fame.... I instantly hunted up the London "Times" and found "Calaynos" advertised for performance,—second night. I showed it to Griswold, who was nearly as much surprised and delighted as myself. Of course he will make good mention of it in his book. It will sell immensely for you, and especially just now, when you are coming out with "Anne Bullen" [sic.]. I shall not fail to have a notice of it in to-morrow morning's "Tribune."

Some authorities state that it was given by Phelps without Boker's consent. Another, who examined Boker's manuscripts, in possession of the poet's



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daughter-in-law, Mrs. George Boker, records that Barrett made cuts in the play, preparatory to giving it, Boker, even, revising it in part. The American premiere was reserved for James E. Murdoch, at the Philadelphia Walnut Street Theater, January 20, 1851, and it was revived at the same playhouse in April, 1855, by E.L. Davenport. As Stoddard says of it, one “should know something—the more the better—about the plays that Dr. Bird and Judge Conrad wrote for Forrest and his successors, about Poe’s ‘Politian’, Sargent’s ‘Velasco’, Longfellow’s ‘Spanish Student’.”

His choice of subject, in this, his first drama, indicated the romantic aloofness of Boker’s mind, for he was always anxious to escape what Leland describes him as saying was a “practical, soulless, Gradgrind age.” In fact, Boker had not as yet found himself; he was more the book-lover than the student of men he afterwards became.

“Read Chaucer for strength,” he advises Stoddard on January 7, 1850, “read Spenser for ease and sweetness, read Milton for sublimity and thought, read Shakespeare for all these things, and for something else which is his alone. Get out of your age as far as you can.”

These young men were not quickly received, and they regarded the utilitarian spirit of the time as against them. To Stoddard Boker once confessed: “Were poetry forged upon the anvil, cut out with the axe, or spun in the mill, my heaven, how men would wonder at the process! What power, what toil, what ingenuity!”

Boker’s correspondence with Stoddard began in a letter, dated September 5, 1849, announcing overtures made by the London Haymarket Theatre for his new tragedy, “Anne Boleyn,” which he was contemplating sending them in sheets. “I have also the assurance,” he announces, “that Miss Cushman will bring it out in this country, provided she thinks her powers adapted to it.”

Boker’s pen was energetic, and it moved at a gait which shows how fertile was his imagination. “The inseparables” cheered the way for each other in the face of official journalistic criticism. Taylor declared “Anne Boleyn” far in advance of “Calaynos,” prophesying that it would last. “Go ahead, my dear poet,” he admonishes, “it will soon be your turn to damn those who would willingly damn you.” Together these friends were always planning to storm the citadel of public favour with poetry, but Boker seems to have been the only one to whom the theatre held out attraction. By August 12, 1850, he was sending news to Stoddard that “The Betrothal” would be staged the following month. In good spirits, he writes:

The manager is getting it up with unusual care and splendour. Spangles and red flannels flame through it from end to end. I even think of appearing before the curtain on horseback, nay, of making the whole performance equestrian, and of introducing a



hippopotamus in the fifth act. What think you? Have you and your miserable lyrics ever known such glory? If the

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play should take *here*, you benighted New-Yorkers will be illuminated with it immediately after it has run its hundredth night in the city which is so proud of its son.

This was the second of his pieces to be given performance, "Anne Boleyn" never seeing the boards. "The Betrothal" was produced at the Philadelphia Walnut Street Theatre, on September 25, 1850, and opened in New York, on November 18 of the same year. Taylor wrote to its author, on December 4: "I saw the last night.... It is even better as an acting play than I had anticipated, but it was very badly acted. I have heard nothing but good of it, from all quarters." It was Elizabethan in tone, quite in the spirit of that romantic drama practised by such American authors as Willis, Sargent and others. How it was received when presented in London, during 1853, is reflected in Boker's letter to Stoddard, dated October 9, 1853:

I have read the *Times* notice of the "Betrothal." It is honey to most of the other newspaper criticisms.... Notwithstanding, and taking the accounts of my enemies for authority, the play was unusually successful with the audience on that most trying occasion, the first night.... The play stands a monument of English injustice. Mark you, it was not prejudice that caused the catastrophe; it was fear lest I should get a footing on their stage, of which "Calaynos" had given them timely warning.

"The Widow's Marriage," in manuscript, and never published, was accepted by Marshall, manager of the Walnut, and is noted by Boker, in a letter to Stoddard, October 12, 1852, the chief handicap confronting him being the inability to find someone suited to take the leading role. Stoddard's own comment was:

Whether [it] was ever produced I know not, but I should say not, for the part of the principal character, *Lady Goldstraw*, is one which no actress whom I remember could have filled to the satisfaction of her creator. The fault of this character (me justice) is that it is too good to be played on a modern stage. It ought to have been written for antiquity two hundred years ago.

Boker was right when he referred to himself as "prolific" at this time. He already had produced, in 1851, according to markings on the manuscript, a piece called "All the World a Mask," and he had written "The Podesta's Daughter," a dramatic sketch, issued, with "Miscellaneous Poems," in 1852. Toward the end of this year, he completed "Leonor de Guzman."

"Her history," he writes to Stoddard, on November 14, "you will find in Spanish Chronicles relating to the reigns of Alfonso XII of Castile and his son, Peter the Cruel. There are no such subjects for historical tragedy on earth as are to be found in the Spanish history of that period. I am so much in love with it that I design following up 'Leonor de Guzman' by 'Don Pedro'. The present tragedy, according to the judgment of Leland, is the very

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best play I have written, both for the closet and the stage. Perhaps I am too ready to agree with him, but long before he said it I had formed the same judgment.”

This tragedy was performed at the Philadelphia Walnut Street Theatre, on October 3, 1853, and at the New York Broadway Theatre, on April 24, 1854. Boker wrote to his friends, showing his customary concern about an actress skilled enough for the role of his heroine. When, finally, for the Philadelphia premiere, Julia Dean was decided upon, he thus expressed his verdict to Stoddard, after the opening performance: “Miss Dean, as far as her physique would admit, played the part admirably, and with a full appreciation of all those things which you call its beauties.”

During these years of correspondence with his friends, Boker was determining to himself the distinction between *poetic* and *dramatic* style.

“Seriously, Dick,” he writes to Stoddard, on October 6, 1850, “there is, to my mind, no English diction for your purposes equal to Milton’s in his minor poems. Of course any man would be an intensified ass who should attempt to reach the diction of the ‘Paradise Lost’, or aspire to the tremendous style of Shakespeare. You must not confound things, though. A Lyric diction is one thing—a Dramatic diction is another, requiring the utmost force and conciseness of expression,—and Epic diction is still another; I conceive it to be something between the Lyric and Dramatic, with all the luxuriance of the former, and all the power of the latter.”

He must have written to Taylor in the same vein, for, in a letter from the latter, there is assurance that he fully understands what a slow growth dramatic style must be. But Boker was not wholly wed to theatrical demands; he still approached the stage in the spirit of the poet who was torn between loyalty to poetic indirectness, and necessity for direct dialogue. On January 12, 1853, he writes to Stoddard:

Theatricals are in a fine state in this country; every inducement is offered to me to burn my plays as fast as I write them. Yet, what can I do? If I print my plays, the actors take them up, butcher, alter and play them, without giving me so much as a hand in my own damnation. This is something beyond even heavenly rigour; and so I proceed to my own destruction, with the proud consciousness that, at all events, it is my own act. *A propos*, have you ever read the English acting copy of my “Calaynos”? A viler thing was never concocted from like materials.

Whether or not the play, “The Bankrupt,” preceded or followed the writing of “Francesca da Rimini” in 1853, we have no way of determining; but it would seem that it progressed no further in its stage career than in manuscript form, it being the only play on a modern theme attempted by Boker. Then, it seems, he was hot on the trail of the Francesca love story told in Dante, and used by so many writers in drama and poetry. It is this

play, conceded to be his best, which is included in the present collection, and which calls for analysis and history by itself.

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Taylor's collection of "Poems at Home and Abroad," dedicated to Boker in 1855, suggests that the two must have continually talked over the possibilities of gathering their best effusions in book form. Did not Taylor write, as early as June 30, 1850, "You must come out in the Fall with a volume of poems. Stoddard will, and so, I think, will I. You can get a capital volume, with your 'Song', 'Sir John', 'Goblet', and other things.... The publishing showmen would of course parade our wonderful qualities, and the snarling critics in the crowd would show their teeth; but we would be as unmoved as the wax statues of Parkman and Webster, except that there might now and then be a sly wink at each other, when nobody was looking." The two friends had been separated for some time, while Taylor wandered over the face of the globe, writing from Cairo, in the shadow of the pyramids, and exclaiming, in Constantinople (July 18, 1852), "There is a touch of the East in your nature, George."

In 1856, Boker prepared his two volumes of "Plays and Poems" for the press. He had won considerable reputation as a sonneteer, and this was further increased by the tradition that Daniel Webster had quoted him at a state dinner in Washington. As yet he was merely a literary poet, and a literary dramatist whose name is usually linked with that Philadelphia group discussed in Vol. II of this collection.[A]

Writing of the Philadelphia of 1868, Leland says:

[It was] "the Philadelphia when 'Emily Schaumbeg' was the belle and Penington's 'store' was the haunt of the booklover, when snow fell with old fashioned violence, and Third Street was convulsed by old-fashioned panics, when everybody went mad over Offenbach, when one started for New York from the Walnut Street Ferry, when George Boker was writing his dramas and George Childs was beginning to play the public Maecenas." Oftentimes the sturdy figure of Walt Whitman could be seen walking on Broad Street, while Horace Greely, buried in newspapers, travelled aboard a boat between New York and Philadelphia.

It was the Civil War that not only turned Boker's pen to the Union Cause, but changed him politically from a Democrat to a staunch Republican. In fact, his name is closely interwoven with the rehabilitation of the Republican party in Philadelphia. He often confessed that his conscience hurt him many times when he realized he cast his first vote for Buchanan. "After that," he is quoted as having said, "the sword was drawn; it struck me that politics had vanished entirely from the scene—that it was now merely a question of patriotism or disloyalty." His "Poems of the War," issued in 1864, contained such examples of his martial and occasional ability as the "Dirge for a Soldier," "On the Death of Philip Kearney" and "The Black Regiment," besides "On Board the Cumberland" and the "Battle of Lookout Mountain."

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About this time, there was founded the Union League Club, with Boker as the leading spirit; through his efforts the war earnestness of the city was concentrated here; from 1863-71 he served as its secretary; from 1879-84 as its President; and his official attitude may be measured in the various annual reports of the organization. But even in those strenuous days—at the period when the Northern spirits lagged over military reverses, and at the time when the indecision of General McClellan drew from him the satiric broadside,—“Tardy George”—privately printed in 1865—Boker’s thoughts were concerned with poetry. His official laureate consciousness did not serve to improve the verse. His “Our Heroic Themes”—written for the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa—was mediocre in everything but intent, recalling what Taylor wrote to him: “My Harvard poem, [he had read it in 1850 before the same fraternity] poor as it is, was received with great applause; but, alas! I published it, and thus killed the tradition of its excellence, which, had I not done so, might still have been floating around Harvard.”

In 1869, Boker issued “Koenigsmark, The Legend of the Hounds and other Poems,” and this ended his dramatic career until his return from abroad, and until Lawrence Barrett came upon the scene with his revival of “Francesca da Rimini” and his interest in Boker’s other work, to the extent of encouraging him to recast “Calaynos” and to prepare “Nydia” (1885), later enlarged from two acts to a full sized drama in “Glaucus” (1886), both drawing for inspiration on Bulwer’s “The Last Days of Pompeii.”

President Grant sent Boker to Constantinople, as U.S. Minister (his appointment dated November 3, 1871)—an honour undoubtedly bestowed in recognition of his national service. Here he remained four years, “and during that time secured the redress for wrongs done American subjects by the Syrians, and successfully negotiated two treaties, one having reference to the extradition of criminals, and the other to the naturalization of subjects of little power in the dominions of the other.” A reception was tendered him on December 22, 1871, by members of the Union League Club, and among those present were Bayard Taylor, Col. George Boker, of the Governor’s staff, and son of Boker, and Dr. Charles S. Boker, his brother. Among those who spoke were Robeson, Secretary of the Navy, and Cameron, U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania. Congratulatory letters were received from Bryant, James T. Fields, Stoddard, Lowell, Longfellow, Aldrich, Curtis, and Stedman. On this occasion, Taylor said: “I know the ripeness and soundness of his mind, the fine balance of his intellectual qualities.”

On December 24, 1871, Boker wrote to Leland:

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The scarcest thing with me just now is time. I might give you a shilling at a pinch, but a half hour is an article which I do not happen to have about me.... By the way, your rhapsody over the East in "M.K." ["Meister Karl"] had something to do with my acceptance of the Turkish Mission; and if you have been lying, I shall find you out, old boy.

Boker's enthusiasm for Turkish scenery was unbounded, but his difficulties as a diplomat were due to his ignorance of the tongue, and his distrust of interpreters. But by the time his Government was ready to transfer him to another post—that of Minister to Russia (January 3, 1875)—he was heartily sick of his wrangling with the Crescent, and glad, as he wrote Leland, "to shake the dust of this dismal old city from my shoes, and prepare my toes for a freezing at St. Petersburg." He echoed his distaste in later years by writing: "I hate the East so profoundly that I should not return to it if there were no other land in which I could live." This promotion to the Russian court—it was a Russian, Ignatieff, who characterized him as "of true diplomatic stuff"—was made in 1875, and he remained there two years.

"While in Russia," we learn, "he was the only one of our Ministers at foreign courts who was able to checkmate Spain in her controversy with us about the *Virginus*. He baffled the Spanish Ambassador at St. Petersburg, and influenced Gortschakoff to send a despatch to Madrid, which caused Spain to apologize to the United States; thus averting serious complications."

Diplomatic life was not wholly distasteful to him; he possessed social distinction which made him popular at both courts, so much so, indeed, that the Czar cabled to Washington, when a change of administration brought Boker's tenure of office to a close, asking if it were not possible to have him retained. He had had his difficulties at the Porte, as Lowell had had at Madrid. But his artistic nature responded quickly to the picturesqueness of his surroundings. "Within a mile of me," he writes Leland from Turkey,—“for I am now living at Therapia upon the Bosphorus—there is a delicious encampment of the black tents of a tribe of Gypsies.” While he was in Russia he was continually supplying Leland with information about gypsies.

He went to Egypt, at the invitation of the Sultan, and—as though recalling Taylor's longing, in 1852, when he was in Cairo, to have Boker with him—took a trip up the Nile, with Leland, whom he had invited to accompany him. Under the palm trees at Misraim, he had his first meeting with Emerson. The varied foreign travel had broadened his taste, and he was quickly responsive to what he saw. Writes Leland:



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I have been with him many times in the Louvre, the great galleries of London and St. Petersburg, and studied with him the stupendous and strange remains of Egyptian art in the Boulak Museum and the Nile temples, but never knew anyone, however learned he might be in such matters, who had a more sincere enjoyment of their greatest results. I remember that he manifested much more interest and deeper feeling for what he saw in Egypt than did Emerson, who was there at the same time, and with whom I conversed daily.

On January 15, 1878, Boker withdrew from diplomatic life, returning to the United States, where he resumed literary work, his chief interest in the stage being revived by his association with Barrett. His home in Philadelphia—one of the literary centres of the time,—bore traces of his Turkish stay—carpets brought from Constantinople, Arabic designs on the draperies, and rich Eastern colours in the tapestried chairs. His experience was obliged to affect his writing, if not in feeling, at least in expression. I note in his “Monody,” written at the time of the death of his friend, the poet, T. Buchanan Read (1822-1872), such lines as “the hilly Bosphorus,” and “... For the hills of Ancient Asia through my trembling tears glimmer like fabrics....” As early as 1855, he had written for the *U.S. Gazette and North American*, an article on Read comparing his “New Pastoral” with the poetry of Cowper and Thompson. But Read to-day is familiar because of his “Sheridan’s Ride.” We are told that Boker had a work-room where he delighted in designing metal scrolls.

There was a slight revival of public interest in his poems, which necessitated the reprinting of several of his books.

“The last time when I saw him,” Stoddard recalls in 1890, “was at the funeral of Taylor, at Cedarcroft, a little more than ten years ago. We rode to the grave, on a hillside, and we rode back to the house. And now he has gone to the great majority!” Boker died in Philadelphia, January 2, 1890. “He takes place with Motley on our roll of well-known authors,” George Parsons Lathrop has written, “and it is even more remarkable that he should have cultivated poetry in Philadelphia, where the conditions were unfavourable, than that Motley should have taken up history in Boston, where the conditions were wholly propitious.”

It is by “Francesca da Rimini” that Boker is best remembered. In a letter to Stoddard, March 3, 1853, he writes:

You will laugh at this, but the thing is so. “Francesca da Rimini” is the title. Of course you know the story,—everyone does; but you nor any one else, do not know it as I have treated it. I have great faith in the successful issue of this new attempt. I think all day, and write all night. This is one of my peculiarities, by the bye: a subject seizes me soul and body, which accounts for the rapidity of my execution. My muse resembles a whirlwind: she catches me up, hurries me along, and drops me all breathless at the end of her career.

And soon this was followed by the letter so often quoted, showing the white-heat of his enthusiasm:



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Now that “Francesca da Rimini” is done,—all but the polishing,—I have time to look around and see how I have been neglecting my friends during my state of “possession.” Of course you wish to know my opinion of the bantling; I shall suppose you do, at all events. Well, then, I am better satisfied with “Francesca da Rimini” than with any of my previous plays. It is impossible for me to say what you, or the world, will say of it; but if it do not please you both, I do not know what I am about. The play is more dramatic than former ones, fiercer in its display of intense passions, and, so far as mere poetry goes, not inferior, if not superior, to any of them. In this play I have dared more, risked more, than I ever had courage to do before. *Ergo*, if it be not a great triumph, it will certainly be a great failure. I doubt whether you, in a hundred guesses, could hit upon the manner in which I have treated the story. I shall not attempt to prejudice you regarding the play; I would rather have you judge for yourself, even if your decision be adverse. Am I not the devil and all for rapid composition? My speed frightens me, and makes me fearful of the merits of my work. Yet, on coolly going over my work, I find little to object to, either as to the main design or its details. I touch up, here and there, but I do little more. The reason for my rapid writing is that I never attempt putting pen to paper before my design is perfectly mature. I never start with one idea, trusting to the glow of poetical composition for the remainder. That will do in lyrical poetry, but it would be death and damnation to dramatic. But just think of it!—twenty-eight hundred lines in about three weeks! To look back upon such labour is appalling! Let me give you the whole history of my manner of composition in a few words. If it be not interesting to you, you differ from me, and I mistake the kind of matters that interest you. While I am writing I eat little, I drink nothing, I meditate my work, literally, all day. By the time night arrives I am in a highly nervous and excited state. About nine o’clock I begin writing and smoking, and I continue the two exercises, *pari passu*, until about four o’clock in the morning. Then I reel to bed, half crazy with cigar-smoke and poesy, sleep five hours, and begin the next day as the former. Ordinarily, I sleep from seven to eight hours; but when I am writing, but five,—simply because I cannot sleep any longer at such times. The consequence of this mode of life is that at the end of a long work I sink at once like a spent horse, and have not energy enough to perform the ordinary duties of life. I *feel* my health giving way under it, but really I do not care. I am ambitious to be remembered among the martyrs.

This letter is not only significant of Boker’s method of workmanship; it is, as well, measure of his charm as a letter writer. For, in correspondence with his close friends, he was as natural with them, as full of force and brightness, as he was in conversation. We find Taylor thanking him at one time, when in distress over family illness and death, for his sustaining words of comfort; we find Leland basking in the warmth of his sheer animal spirits. To the latter, Boker once wrote:

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Dear old Charley, you are the only man living with whom I can play the fool through a long letter and be sure that I shall be clearly understood at the end. To say that this privilege is cheerful is to say little, for it is the breath of life to a man of a certain humour.

The “Francesca” note, therefore, is typical of Boker’s enthusiasm. When Stoddard read the play, we wonder whether he saw in it any similarities to Leigh Hunt’s poem on the same subject? For once he had detected in Boker’s verses the influence of Hunt. There are critics who claim Boker had read closely Hugo’s “Le Roi s’Amuse.” But there is only one real comparison to make—with Shakespeare, to the detriment of Boker. His memory beat in Elizabethan rhythm, and beat haltingly. The present Editor began noting on the margin of his copy parallelisms of thought and expression in this “Francesca” and in the plays of Shakespeare; these similarities became so many, were so apparent, that it is thought best to omit them. The text used is not based on the manuscripts left by Boker, nor has it been compared with the acting copy made, in 1855, for E.L. Davenport, as has already been done elsewhere in print. I have preferred to use the text finally prepared by Boker for his published plays, this being the one which met with his approval. In 1882, Lawrence Barrett, with the aid of William Winter, prepared an acting version of “Francesca,” and it was this which Mr. Otis Skinner used, when he revived the piece in 1901.

A notice in The New York *Tribune* for 1882 suggests that when E.L. Davenport first essayed “Francesca da Rimini,” in 1855, it was in one-act. I can find no corroboration of this statement. The play-bill here reproduced specifically announces a *five* act tragedy, and it is to be inferred that the form of the play, as given at the Broadway Theatre, New York, September 26, 1855,[B] was the only one used by him. Winter claims that as *Lanciotto*, Davenport was “unimaginative, mechanical, and melodramatic,” and that the whole piece “proved tedious.” This is strange, considering the heroic and romantic characteristics in Davenport’s method of acting. It may be that he attempted Boker’s play because of his interest in the development of American drama. He had assisted Mrs. Mowatt in her career as playwright, and, during his full life, his name was identified with Boker’s “Calaynos,” George H. Miles’s tragedy, “De Soto, the Hero of the Mississippi,” and Conrad’s “Jack Cade.” But the concensus of opinion is that Boker’s “Francesca da Rimini,” as given by Davenport, was a failure.

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An examination of the cast in the Davenport program with the cast as it was when Boker issued the play, indicates that the text must have been considerably changed, and certain characters omitted, when, at the suggestion of Winter, Lawrence Barrett promised to revive it during the summer of 1882. The scholarly turn of Barrett's mind must have made him ponder it well during a trip he made abroad at the time, and Boker, meanwhile, must have been cutting the cloth to suit the actor's ideas. Barron, one of Barrett's biographers, claims that "Mr. Barrett saw great possibilities in the work, and with his practical assistance the play was suitably changed, new situations were effected, a more picturesque colouring was given the scenes and story, and all that was repellant in the too close following of Dante [!] was removed." The play was given by Barrett, at Haverly's Theatre, Chicago, on September 14, 1882, Otis Skinner playing *Paolo*, and Marie Wainwright appearing as *Francesca*. In Winter's estimate of the performance, we find the dominant characteristics being "moderation" and "balanced growth." He says of *Lanciotto*: "Alertness of the brain sustained it, at every point, in brilliant vigour, and it rose in power, and expanded in terrible beauty, accordingly as it was wrought upon by the pressure of circumstances and the conflict of passions."

The memory of this must have affected the interpretation of Mr. Skinner, when, as *Lanciotto*, in his revival of the piece at the Chicago Grand Opera House, August 22, 1901, with Aubrey Boucicault as *Paolo*, Marcia Van Dresser as *Francesca*, and William Norris as *Pepe*, he met with such success. "D'Annunzio gives us the soldier and the brute," he wrote me in 1904. "Boker's hero is an idealist—almost a dreamer." The fact is, Boker was recalling his memories of *Othello* and *Richard III*, if not of *Hamlet*, as Skinner suggests. In another respect did the Barrett performance affect the later revival. The portrayal of *Pepe*, by Norris, was based on what he called "the James tradition," Louis James having, as Winter wrote, "a laughter that is more terrible than malice."

Lawrence Barrett's interest in the American drama was never very pronounced. He sought Boker's "Francesca da Rimini," as he sought W.D. Howells' "Yorick's Love" (given at Cleveland, Ohio, October 26, 1878), because the roles therein suited his temperament. Between him and Boker, there was some misunderstanding of short duration, about royalties, but this was bridged over, and Boker's final attempts at playwriting were made for him. The reader is referred to Vol. 32, n.s. Vol. XXV, no. 2, June, 1917, of the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, for statements as to Boker's "profits" from the stage.

After Otis Skinner's revival of "Francesca da Rimini," it was played for a while by Frederick Ward and Louis James in association (1893) and by Frank C. Bangs in 1892.



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Hosts of dramas have been written on “Francesca da Rimini,” and every poet has essayed at one time or another to surpass Dante’s incomparable lines. Music scores have glorified this passionate love story, while marble and canvas have caught the external expression of it. In its portrayal, actual history has taken on legendary character, and so “Francesca da Rimini” now ranks as a theme with the history of Lancelot and Guinevere, of Tristan and Isolde. It has become the inspiration for Maeterlinck in “Pelleas and Melisande,” who has viewed the Italian passion through a mirage of mysticism.

Into “The Divine Comedy,” the account of Francesca and Paolo is dropped, keen, sensitive and delicate, as though the poet, a friend of those concerned, wished to cover the hard fact of illicit love in an ecstasy of human feeling. Dante, the supreme master of his age, the incomparable lover of Beatrice, differentiated this tragedy from countless incidents of like character which marked his age. Had the story been preserved only in the form recorded by Boccaccio, it would have been lost in its minor details of history; whereas Dante has glorified it.

By the very fact that Dante places the two lovers in the circle of the Lustful, it is clear that he realized the enormity of their sin. The theory that his friendship with Guido Novella, the nephew of Francesca, made Dante refrain from entering fully into the incident, will not hold, when it is remembered that the cantos of the Inferno were written in 1300, seventeen years before the poet reached Ravenna, and accepted the hospitality of the Polenta house. Dante’s infinite compassion is, therefore, the cause for the compressed poetry of this famous passage.

Dante’s Francesca lines have been infinitely translated. Longfellow is conscientious; Byron chafes to be freed of the original Italian, and his lines are irksome; Rossetti sees and feels, but he is laboured. Dante, infinitely translated, remains supreme.

The poems on this ideal love legend are of infinite variety. Tassoni describes Paolo, the warrior, consumed with ravishing love, “shrunk with misery;” he fails to reach the youthful passion, and is as mediaevally chivalric as is Chaucer in “The Knightes Tale” of Palamon and Arcite. Leigh Hunt resorts to stilted narrative and description.

Byron once thought to write a drama on this subject; had he done so, Silvio Pellico might have had a formidable rival. More or less, all the playwrights have gone to Italian history, and the more exact they became, the more gross the situation. F. Marion Crawford fell on this rock of accuracy, when he wrote his Francesca play for *Mme. Sarah Bernhardt*.



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Silvio Pellico, who wrote the first drama on “*Francesca da Rimini*” known to modern playgoers, lived his early life in an intensely religious atmosphere, and suffered imprisonment later because of his patriotic tendencies; it is not surprising, therefore, to find in his play—first a national appeal that was to win it applause from all Italy, and then, more important still, a purity of tone that struggled most nobly against an inevitable, passionate end. *Paolo* is the one who, after some scruples, succumbs; *Francesca* is infinitely conscious that she is a wife; *Giovanni* is suspicious. It would seem that Pellico’s play is the first that realized the theatrical possibilities of the story; research has brought to light no play manuscript previous to his.

In the handling of his details, Pellico’s incongruities and artificialities are many. *Paolo* returns from knightly deeds in Asia, to find his father dead—the *Malatesta Verucchio* who died in 1312, twenty-seven years after *Giovanni* committed the murder; therefore Pellico gives to the deformed brother the power that history does not wholly accord. The dramatist would avoid the indelicacy he finds in the reading incident, recounting it only in a situation during which *Francesca* holds aloof in a wild effort to stifle her love. Throughout the play, there is this ruthless twisting, in a desire to conceal wrong and unpardonable sin.

Turning to Uhland’s fragmentary ideas, which even he himself was doubtful whether he could handle, an atmosphere confronts us as mediaevally German as the “*Der arme Heinrich*” of Hartmann von Aue, which was the inspirational source for Longfellow’s “*The Golden Legend*.” Uhland shows heaviness in conception, and a conventionality, thoroughly at variance with the tragedy’s original passion. Romantic as he is, he has robbed the story of its warm southern nature, and has thrown his Dante aside to deal with false situation. He seems willing to let fact and spirit go. *Paolo* is a knight who tilts and worships a glove. Uhland thinks, and he is not alone in his belief, that *Francesca* had been promised to *Paolo* before *Giovanni* was wedded to her; yet if *Paolo*’s marriage with *Orabile*, in 1269, is to be recognized as correct, historically, logical deductions from dates would discountenance the statement. Neither have I found commentaries to support the theory that *Paolo* was older than *Giovanni*, as Uhland sets forth in his play. The servant in Boccaccio here becomes a jealous lover. It is interesting to note the variations of this counter-element in the many play versions of the story—the element that urges *Giovanni*’s suspicion to quick action—the dramatic force of *Pepe* in Boker; the disappointed motherhood and embittered love of *Lucrezia* in Stephen Phillips; the inborn savagery of *Malatestino* in D’Annunzio; the innocent unconsciousness of *Concordia* in Crawford, which finds similarity in a scene in Maeterlinck’s “*Pelleas and Melisande*” between father and little son. Further, in Uhland, a distorted glimpse of a colourless reportorial figure of Dante, gathering material for his poem, is as meaningless as it is unnecessary for atmosphere.



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Stephen Phillips, in his *Francesca* drama, ignores altogether Italian temperament; save for the fact that he occasionally mentions the Tyrant of Rimini, Pesaro and Florence, and that he adheres to historic names, there is more of the English hamlet romance in the piece, than Italian passion. And that cannot be said of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." Perhaps one may claim for Phillips some of the simplicity of Dante, but there is not the humanity. Undeniably, the English poet is happy in phrase and imagery, but his genius is not so dramatic as it is poetic; he has some of the great lyrical feeling of Tennyson, and he has that which distinguishes the poet from the dramatist—the power to *describe* situation. One cannot deny the appeal of his girl-Francesca, nor the beauty of many of his haunting lines; but no warm impression of the situation is gained, and the characters are peculiarly inactive at inopportune times. Mr. Phillips's talent was predominantly undramatic; he was too much the poet to allow his feeling to be guided by historical material. Yet, as acted, the play was charmingly simple.

On the other hand, D'Annunzio, in his drama, saturates himself with the history of Italy. In bulk, his play has not the slightest claim to simplicity; the main object of the dramatist seemed to have been to overweight the scenes with the licentious and rude Italy of the thirteenth century; extraneous side-issues burden the progress of the plot. Yet D'Annunzio has taken care that this does not affect his central theme. On the stage, the scenes appear cumbersome, and the action moves slowly; but, after analyzing the book, it may be claimed for this "*Francesca da Rimini*," that it reflects the age in which the tragedy occurred. Much artistic construction is shown in the contrast of the Polenta and Malatesta families, and, repellent as he is at times, D'Annunzio has moments of great poetic fervour; his fire swings forth in many of *Francesca's* speeches, that alternate with the languor of her symbolic nature.

That his drama on *Francesca* was definitely constructed for theatrical effect, was openly avowed by Marion Crawford. At the beginning of the French version made for *Mme. Bernhardt*, he placed material that showed his intention of dealing with fact in the manner of a novelist, and regardless of the sweetness of Dante. To him, *Concordia* is fourteen, since he considers 1289 as the date of the tragedy, and, with his details from Boccaccio's commentary, he has coarsened *Francesca*, making her bitterness full of the spleen that could only accompany maturity. A striking point is to be noted in the strong vein of Catholicism that colours many of the speeches.

Paolo's wife, *Orabile*, moves through the D'Annunzio play with only slight mention—to show the husband's avoidance of her—to draw attention to her deep-rooted aversion to *Francesca*. Mr. Crawford also brings her on the scene, and has *Paolo* the cause of her death, wittingly distorting history, since *Orabile* died many years after the murder of her husband.



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The only American drama on the subject is that by Boker; it is a peculiarly contradictory piece of work, since, from the standpoint of the stage, it is essentially and effectively dramatic, while as literature it is imitative of the Elizabethan style. Boker's poetic imagery is distinctly borrowed, and his choice of words disappointingly colloquial. Yet, over and above the mere story, he has succeeded in portraying a strong character in his *Pepe*. The historical setting of the play is slight, yet sufficient to localize the piece, and his *dramatis personae* are faithfully distinct in outline, though at times devoid of consuming passion.

Phillips as a dramatist has the fault of being diffuse; Boker's style is prosaically plain. Were it not for over-elaboration, D'Annunzio's play might supplant all others because of its spirit. Could we take from Phillips his simplicity, from D'Annunzio his Italian intensity, and from Boker his proportion, and could we add these to Crawford's realization of situation, toned away from his melodramatic tendencies, an ideal drama on "Francesca da Rimini" might be constructed.

But the revitalizing power that was given Shakespeare, has been bequeathed to none who have followed Dante. The one beauty of the Francesca story is the simple element that permeates the dark motive. The genius required to deal with it lies in this: to make one conscious of the tragedy in a touch that recalls the beauty of spring.

It is strange that no other poet than Dante has succeeded in catching this beauty. No poet, writing directly on the theme, has the subtle feeling which may be compared with that of the Italian. Richard Le Gallienne is infinitely superior to Hunt; Lowell and Gilder beyond the lesser poets,—but all fade before the master. They treat of the vision of Hell, with its whirling wind; of the two in close embrace; there is the kiss that ends the reading of a self-same love; there is the flash of a dagger that joins them eternally in death. These are the themes for the songs. The artists have done with brush and pencil, what the poets have tried in sonnets and verse. But it is Dante who dominates them everyone.

To me, after tracing in part the development of this Italian tragedy, there remains the charm of Dante's simplicity, and were one to ask, who, among the moderns, have partially reflected his passion, I should turn to Keats' insatiable thirst for beauty in his sonnet, "A Dream, After reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca," and his account of it in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats (February 14, 1819), and to Carlyle's appreciation of tragedy and love, in "The Hero as a Poet."

Boker's "Francesca da Rimini" will stand largely because, in structure and in directness, it is strikingly effective for the stage.

[Footnote A: Duyckinck recalls that, in 1862, R.T. Conrad's "Devotional Poems" were published, edited by Boker.]



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[Footnote B: We find a record of Mrs. John Drew having, as *Francesca*, supported Davenport when the play was taken to Philadelphia.]

BROADWAY THEATRE

* * * * *

LESSEE MR. E.A. MARSHALL
STAGE MANAGER MR. W.R. BLAKE

* * * * *

SECOND WEEK OF THE
REGULAR SEASON!

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CONTINUATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE EMINENT

=AMERICAN ACTOR=

MR. E.L. DAVENPORT

* * * * *

FIRST TIME ON ANY STAGE OF

=THE TRAGEDY=

by G.H. BOKER, Esq., author of "Calaynos," "Betrothal," &c called

=Francesca da Rimini=

Will appear in an entirely
ORIGINAL CHARACTER!!

* * * * *

This production of a popular and most talented Native Author will be brought forward with the efficient aid of



ESTABLISHED PERFORMERS!
NEW AND APPROPRIATE SCENERY!!
COSTUMES, PROPERTIES, DECORATIONS!!!
APPOINTMENTS, MUSIC and PAGANTRY!!!!

* * * * *

WEDNESDAY EVENING, SEPT 26, 1855
Will be presented the Tragedy, in five acts, by G.H. BOKER, Esq., entitled

=FRANCESCA=
=DA=
=RIMINI=

CHARACTERS REPRESENTED.

GUELPHS.

Malatesto, (Lord of Rimini) Mr. Whiting
LANCIOTTO {his sons } Mr. E.L. DAVENPORT
Paolo { } Mr. Lanergan
Pepe, (the Jester) Mr. C. Flaheer
Rosalvi { } Mr. Walters
Malvechi {Young Nobles—companions of Paolo } Mr. Harcourt
Civanti { } Mr. Cutter
Rene, (a Troubadour) Mr. Vincent
Nobles, Soldiers, Pages, Troubadours, Attendants, &c, &c.

GHIBELINS.

Guido da Polenta, (Lord of Ravenna) Mr. Canoll
The Cardinal Veechino Mr. Hodges
Florensi {Nobles of Malatesto's Court} Mr. Willet
Beppo { } Joraike
Henrico, (Captain of the Guard) Mr. Fordyck
Antonio, (A leader of the Forces) Mr. Wright
Nobles, Dignitaries of the Church, Soldiers, Pages, Banner
Bearers, Messengers, &c.

Francesca da Rimini, (Daughter of Guido) Mme Poniat
Ritta, (her attendant) Miss J. Manners

* * * * *

TO-MORROW EVENING—A NEW TRAGEDY, in which



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=MR. E.L. DAVENPORT=
Will appear

* * * * *

TREASURER Mr. P. WARREN
ASSISTANT TREASURER Mr. NAGLE
* * * * *

Doors open at three quarters past 6 o'clock—Performances will commence
an half past 7, precisely.

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS[A]

By GEORGE H. BOKER

[Footnote A: The text that follows was compared with Lawrence Barrett's copy of the second edition, now in the library of The Players, New York. The title page reads: *Plays and Poems: | by | George H. Boker | In two volumes | Vol. I | Second Edition | Boston: | Ticknor and Fields. | MDCCCLVII. | | Boker's copyright, 1856.*]

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

McVicker's Theatre, Chicago, November 6, 1882

MALATESTA, *Lord of Rimini* Mr. B.G. Rogers.
GUIDO DA POLENTA, *Lord of Ravenna* Mr. F.C. Mosley.
LANCIOTTO, *Malatesta's son* Mr. Lawrence Barrett.
PAOLO, *His brother* Mr. Otis Skinner.
PEPE,[1] *Malatesta's jester* Mr. Louis James.
CARDINAL, *Friend to Guido* Mr. Charles Rolfe.
RENE,[1] *A troubadour* Mr. Percy Winter.
FRANCESCA DA RIMINI, *Guido's daughter* Miss Marie Wainwright.
RITTA, *Her maid* Miss Rosie Batchelder.

Lords, Ladies, Knights, Priests, Soldiers, Pages, Attendants, etc.

Grand Opera House, Chicago, August 26, 1901.

MALATESTA, *Lord of Rimini* Mr. W.J. Constantine.
GUIDO DA POLENTA, *Lord of Ravenna* Mr. E.A. Eberle.



LANCIOTTO, *Malatesta's son* Mr. Otis Skinner.

PAOLO, *His brother* Mr. Aubrey Boucicault.

PEPE, *Malatesta's jester* Mr. William Norris.

CARDINAL, *Friend to Guido* Mr. Frederick von Rensselaer.

RENE, *A troubadour* Mr. Fletcher Norton.

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI, *Guido's daughter* Miss Marcia Van Dresser.

RITTA, *Her maid* Miss Gertrude Norman.

Lords, Ladies, Knights, Priests, Soldiers, Pages, Attendants, etc. SCENE. *Rimini, Ravenna, and the neighbourhood.* TIME. *About 1300 A.D.*

[Footnote 1: In the original edition, the accents in the names of PEPE and RENE are used only in the Dramatis Personae, and not in the body of the book.]

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

ACT I.

SCENE I. *Rimini. The Garden of the Palace. PAOLO and a number of noblemen are discovered, seated under an arbour, surrounded by RENE, and other troubadours, attendants, &c.*



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PAOLO. I prithee, Rene, charm our ears again
With the same song you sang me yesterday.
Here are fresh listeners.

RENE. Really, my good lord,
My voice is out of joint. A grievous cold—

[Coughs.]

PAOLO. A very grievous, but convenient cold,
Which always racks you when you would not sing.

RENE. O, no, my lord! Besides, I hoped to hear
My ditty warbled into fairer ears,
By your own lips; to better purpose, too.

[The NOBLEMEN all laugh.]

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Rene has hit it. Music runs to waste
In ears like ours.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Nay, nay; chaunt on, sweet Count.

PAOLO. *[Coughing.]* Alack! you hear, I've caught poor Rene's cough.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. That would not be, if we wore petticoats.

[The others laugh.]

PAOLO. O, fie!

FIRST NOBLEMAN. So runs the scandal to our ears.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Confirmed by all our other senses, Count.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. Witnessed by many a doleful sigh, poured out
By many a breaking heart in Rimini.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. Poor girls!

FIRST NOBLEMAN. *[Mimicking a lady.]* Sweet Count! sweet
Count Paolo! O!
Plant early violets upon my grave!
Thus go a thousand voices to one tune.

[The others laugh.]



PAOLO. 'Ods mercy! gentlemen, you do me wrong.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. And by how many hundred, more or less?

PAOLO. Ah! rogues, you'd shift your sins upon my shoulders.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. You'd bear them stoutly.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. It were vain to give Drops to god Neptune. You're the sea of love
That swallows all things.

SECOND NOBLEMAN. We the little fish
That meanly scull about within your depths.

PAOLO. Goon, goon! Talk yourselves fairly out.
[PEPE *laughs without.*

But, hark! here comes the fool! Fit company
For this most noble company of wits!

[*Enter PEPE, laughing violently.*]

Why do you laugh?

PEPE. I'm laughing at the world.
It has laughed long enough at me; and so
I'll turn the tables. Ho! ho! ho! I've heard
A better joke of Uncle Malatesta's
Than any I e'er uttered. [*Laughing.*

ALL. Tell it, fool.

PEPE. Why, do you know—upon my life, the best
And most original idea on earth:
A joke to put in practice, too. By Jove!
I'll bet my wit 'gainst the stupidity
Of the best gentleman among you all,
You cannot guess it.

ALL. Tell us, tell us, fool.

PEPE. Guess it, guess it, fools.

PAOLO Come, disclose, disclose!

PEPE. He has a match afoot.—



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ALL. A match!

PEPE. A marriage.

ALL. Who?—who?

PEPE. A marriage in his family.

ALL. But, who?

PEPE. Ah! there's the point.

ALL. Paolo?

PEPE. No.

FIRST NOBLEMAN. The others are well wived. Shall we turn Turks?

PEPE. Why, there's the summit of his joke, good sirs.
By all the sacred symbols of my art—
By cap and bauble, by my tinkling bell—
He means to marry Lanciotto!

[Laughs violently.]

ALL. *[Laughing.]* Ho!—

PAOLO. Peace! peace! What tongue dare echo yon fool's laugh?
Nay, never raise your hands in wonderment:
I'll strike the dearest friend among ye all
Beneath my feet, as if he were a slave,
Who dares insult my brother with a laugh!

PEPE. By Jove! ye're sad enough. Here's mirth's quick cure!
Pretty Paolo has a heavy fist, I warn you, sirs. Ho! ho! I trapped them all;
[Laughing.]
Now I'll go mar old Malatesta's message. *[Aside.]*
[Exit.]

PAOLO. Shame on ye, sirs! I have mistaken you.
I thought I harboured better friends. Poor fops,
Who've slept in down and satin all your years,
Within the circle Lanciotto charmed
Round Rimini with his most potent sword!—
Fellows whose brows would melt beneath a casque,



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MALATESTA. No, no; your last bout levelled him. He reeled
Into Ravenna, from the battle-field,
Like a stripped drunkard, and there headlong fell—
A mass of squalid misery, a thing
To draw the jeering urchins. I have this
From faithful spies. There's not a hope remains
To break the shock of his great overthrow.
I pity Guido.

LANCIOTTO. 'Sdeath! go comfort him!
I pity those who fought, and bled, and died,
Before the armies of this Ghibelin.
I pity those who halted home with wounds
Dealt by his hand. I pity widowed eyes
That he set running; maiden hearts that turn,
Sick with despair, from ranks thinned down by him;
Mothers that shriek, as the last stragglers fling
Their feverish bodies by the fountain-side,
Dumb with mere thirst, and faintly point to him,
Answering the dame's quick questions. I have seen
Unburied bones, and skulls—that seemed to ask,
From their blank eye-holes, vengeance at my hand—
Shine in the moonlight on old battle-fields;
And even these—the happy dead, my lord—
I pity more than Guido of Ravenna!

MALATESTA. What would you have?

LANCIOTTO. I'd see Ravenna burn,
Flame into heaven, and scorch the flying clouds;
I'd choke her streets with ruined palaces;
I'd hear her women scream with fear and grief,
As I have heard the maids of Rimini.
All this I'd sprinkle with old Guido's blood,
And bless the baptism.

MALATESTA. You are cruel.

LANCIOTTO. Not I;
But these things ache within my fretting brain.
The sight I first beheld was from the arms
Of my wild nurse, her husband hacked to death
By the fierce edges of these Ghibelins.
One cut across the neck—I see it now,



Ay, and have mimicked it a thousand times,
Just as I saw it, on our enemies.—
Why, that cut seemed as if it meant to bleed
On till the judgment. My distracted nurse
Stooped down, and paddled in the running gore
With her poor fingers; then a prophetess,
Pale with the inspiration of the god,
She towered aloft, and with her dripping hand
Three times she signed me with the holy cross.
Tis all as plain as noon-day. Thus she spake,—
“May this spot stand till Guido’s dearest blood
Be mingled with thy own!” The soldiers say,
In the close battle, when my wrath is up,
The dead man’s blood flames on my vengeful brow
Like a red planet; and when war is o’er,
It shrinks into my brain, defiling all
My better nature with its slaughterous lusts.
Howe’er it be, it shaped my earliest thought,
And it will shape my last.

MALATESTA. You moody churl!
You dismal knot of superstitious dreams!
Do you not blush to empty such a head
Before a sober man? Why, son, the world
Has not given o’er its laughing humour yet,
That you should try it with such vagaries.—Poh!
I’ll get a wife to teach you common sense.



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LANCIOTTO. A wife for me! [*Laughing*].

MALATESTA. Ay, sir, a wife for you.
You shall be married, to insure your wits.

LANCIOTTO. 'Tis not your wont to mock me.

MALATESTA. How now, son!
I am not given to jesting. I have chosen
The fairest wife in Italy for you.
You won her bravely, as a soldier should:
And when you'd woo her, stretch your gauntlet out,
And crush her fingers in its steely grip.
If you will plead, I ween, she dare not say—
No, by your leave. Should she refuse, howe'er,
With that same iron hand you shall go knock
Upon Ravenna's gates, till all the town
Ring with your courtship. I have made her hand
The price and pledge of Guido's future peace.

LANCIOTTO. All this is done!

MALATESTA. Done, out of hand; and now
I wait a formal answer, nothing more.
Guido dare not decline. No, by the saints,
He'd send Ravenna's virgins here in droves,
To buy a ten days' truce.

LANCIOTTO. Sir, let me say,
You stretch paternal privilege too far,
To pledge my hand without my own consent.
Am I a portion of your household stuff,
That you should trade me off to Guido thus?
Who is the lady I am bartered for?

MALATESTA. Francesca, Guido's daughter.—Never frown;
It shall be so!

LANCIOTTO. By heaven, it shall not be!
My blood shall never mingle with his race.

MALATESTA. According to your nurse's prophecy,
Fate orders it.

LANCIOTTO. Ha!



MALATESTA. Now, then, I have struck
The chord that answers to your gloomy thoughts.
Bah! on your sibyl and her prophecy!
Put Guido's blood aside, and yet, I say,
Marry you shall.

LANCIOTTO. 'Tis most distasteful, sir.

MALATESTA. Lanciotto, look ye! You brave gentlemen,
So fond of knocking out poor people's brains,
In time must come to have your own knocked out:
What, then, if you bequeath us no new hands,
To carry on your business, and our house
Die out for lack of princes?

LANCIOTTO. Wed my brothers:
They'll rear you sons, I'll slay you enemies.
Paolo and Francesca! Note their names;
They chime together like sweet marriage-bells.
A proper match. 'Tis said she's beautiful;
And he is the delight of Rimini,—
The pride and conscious centre of all eyes,
The theme of poets, the ideal of art,
The earthly treasury of Heaven's best gifts!
I am a soldier; from my very birth,
Heaven cut me out for terror, not for love.
I had such fancies once, but now—

MALATESTA. Pshaw! son,
My faith is bound to Guido; and if you
Do not throw off your duty, and defy,
Through sickly scruples, my express commands,
You'll yield at once. No more: I'll have it so! [*Exit.*



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LANCIOTTO. Curses upon my destiny! What, I—
Ho! I have found my use at last—What, I,
I, the great twisted monster of the wars,
The brawny cripple, the herculean dwarf,
The spur of panic, and the butt of scorn—
be a bridegroom! Heaven, was I not cursed
More than enough, when thou didst fashion me
To be a type of ugliness,—a thing
By whose comparison all Rimini
Holds itself beautiful? Lo! here I stand,
A gnarled, blighted trunk! There's not a knave
So spindle-shanked, so wry-faced, so infirm,
Who looks at me, and smiles not on himself.
And I have friends to pity me—great Heaven!
One has a favourite leg that he bewails,—
Another sees my hip with doleful plaints,—
A third is sorry o'er my huge swart arms,—
A fourth aspires to mount my very hump,
And thence harangue his weeping brotherhood!
Pah! it is nauseous! Must I further bear
The sidelong shuddering glances of a wife?
The degradation of a showy love,
That over-acts, and proves the mummer's craft
Untouched by nature? And a fair wife, too!—
Francesca, whom the minstrels sing about!
Though, by my side, what woman were not fair?
Circe looked well among her swine, no doubt;
Next me, she'd pass for Venus. Ho! ho! ho! [*Laughing.*]
Would there were something merry in my laugh!
Now, in the battle, if a Ghibelin
Cry, "Wry-hip! hunchback!" I can trample him
Under my stallion's hoofs; or haggie him
Into a monstrous likeness of myself:
But to be pitied,—to endure a sting
Thrust in by kindness, with a sort of smile!—
'Sdeath! it is miserable!

[*Enter PEPE.*

PEPE. My lord—

LANCIOTTO. My fool!

PEPE. We'll change our titles when your bride's bells ring— Ha, cousin?



LANCIOTTO. Even this poor fool has eyes,
To see the wretched plight in which I stand.

[*Aside.*]

How, gossip, how?

PEPE. I, being the court-fool,
Am lord of fools by my prerogative.

LANCIOTTO. Who told you of my marriage?

PEPE. Rimini!
A frightful liar; but true for once, I fear.
The messenger from Guido has returned,
And the whole town is wailing over him.
Some pity you, and some the bride; but I,
Being more catholic, I pity both.

LANCIOTTO. Still, pity, pity! [*Aside. Bells toll.*] Ha! whose knell is that?

PEPE. Lord Malatesta sent me to the tower,
To have the bells rung for your marriage-news.
How, he said not; so I, as I thought fit,
Told the deaf sexton to ring out a knell.
[*Bells toll.*]
How do you like it?

LANCIOTTO. Varlet, have you bones,
To risk their breaking? I have half a mind
To thresh you from your motley coat!

[*Seizes him.*]



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PEPE. Pardee!

Respect my coxcomb, cousin. Hark! ha, ha!

[*Laughing.*]

[*Bells ring a joyful peal.*]

Some one has changed my music. Heaven defend!

How the bells jangle. Yonder graybeard, now,

Rings a peal vilely. He's more used to knells,

And sounds them grandly. Only give him time,

And, I'll be sworn, he'll ring your knell out yet.

LANCIOTTO. Pepe, you are but half a fool.

PEPE. My lord,

I can return the compliment in full.

LANCIOTTO. So, you are ready.

PEPE. Truth is always so.

LANCIOTTO. I shook you rudely; here's a florin.

[*Offers money.*]

PEPE. No:

My wit is merchandise, but not my honour.

LANCIOTTO. Your honour, sirrah!

PEPE. Why not? You great lords

Have something you call lordly honour; pray,

May not a fool have foolish honour, too?

Cousin, you laid your hand upon my coat—

'Twas the first sacrilege it ever knew—And

you shall pay it. Mark! I promise you.

LANCIOTTO. [*Laughing.*] Ha, ha! you bluster well. Upon my life,

You have the tilt-yard jargon to a breath.

Pepe, if I should smite you on the cheek—

Thus, gossip, thus—[*Strikes him.*] what would you then demand?

PEPE. Your life!

LANCIOTTO. [*Laughing.*] Ha, ha! there is the camp-style, too,

A very cut-throat air! How this shrewd fool Makes the punctilio of honour show!

Change helmets into coxcombs, swords to baubles,

And what a figure is poor chivalry!



Thanks for your lesson, Pepe.

[Exit.]

PEPE. Ere I'm done,
You'll curse as heartily, you limping beast!
Ha! so we go—Lord Lanciotto, look!
[Walks about, mimicking him.]
Here is a leg and camel-back, forsooth,
To match your honour and nobility!
You miscreated scarecrow, dare you shake,
Or strike in jest, a natural man like me?—
You cursed lump, you chaos of a man,
To buffet one whom Heaven pronounces good!
[Bells ring.]

There go the bells rejoicing over you:
I'll change them back to the old knell again.
You marry, faugh! Beget a race of elves;
Wed a she-crocodile, and keep within
The limits of your nature! Here we go,
Tripping along to meet our promised bride,
Like a rheumatic elephant!—ha, ha! [Laughing.]

[Exit, mimicking LANCIOTTO.]

SCENE III.

The Same. A Room in the Same. Enter LANCIOTTO, hastily.



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LANCIOTTO. Why do these prodigies environ me?
In ancient Rome, the words a fool might drop,
From the confusion of his vagrant thoughts,
Were held as omens, prophecies; and men
Who made earth tremble with majestic deeds,
Trembled themselves at fortune's lightest threat.
I like it not. My father named this match
While I boiled over with vindictive wrath
Towards Guido and Ravenna. Straight my heart
Sank down like lead; a weakness seized on me,
A dismal gloom that I could not resist;
I lacked the power to take my stand, and say—
Bluntly, I will not! Am I in the toils?
Has fate so weakened me, to work its end?
There seems a fascination in it, too,—
A morbid craving to pursue a thing
Whose issue may be fatal. Would that I
Were in the wars again! These mental weeds
Grow on the surface of inactive peace.
I'm haunted by myself. Thought preys on thought.
My mind seems crowded in the hideous mould
That shaped my body. What a fool am I
To bear the burden of my wretched life,
To sweat and toil under the world's broad eye,
Climb into fame, and find myself—O, what?—
A most conspicuous monster! Crown my head,
Pile Caesar's purple on me—and what then?
My hump shall shorten the imperial robe,
My leg peep out beneath the scanty hem,
My broken hip shall twist the gown awry;
And pomp, instead of dignifying me,
Shall be by me made quite ridiculous.
The faintest coward would not bear all this:
Prodigious courage must be mine, to live;
To die asks nothing but weak will, and I
Feel like a craven. Let me skulk away
Ere life o'ertask me. [*Offers to stab himself.*]

Enter PAOLO.

PAOLO. [*Seizing his hand.*] Brother! what is this?
Lanciotto, are you mad? Kind Heaven! look here—
Straight in my eyes. Now answer, do you know
How near you were to murder? Dare you bend



Your wicked hand against a heart I love?
Were it for you to mourn your wilful death,
With such a bitterness as would be ours,
The wish would ne'er have crossed you. While we're bound
Life into life, a chain of loving hearts,
Were it not base in you, the middle link,
To snap, and scatter all? Shame, brother, shame!
I thought you better metal.

LANCIOTTO. Spare your words.
I know the seasons of our human grief,
And can predict them without almanac.
A few sobs o'er the body, and a few
Over the coffin; then a sigh or two,
Whose windy passage dries the hanging tear;
Perchance, some wandering memories, some regrets;
Then a vast influx of consoling thoughts—
Based on the trials of the sadder days
Which the dead missed; and then a smiling face
Turned on to-morrow. Such is mortal grief.
It writes its histories within a span,
And never lives to read them.



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PAOLO. Lanciotto,
I heard the bells of Rimini, just now,
Exulting o'er your coming marriage-day,
While you conspired to teach them gloomier sounds.
Why are you sad?

LANCIOTTO. Paolo, I am wretched;
Sad's a faint word. But of my marriage-bells—
Heard you the knell that Pepe rang?

PAOLO. 'Twas strange:
A sullen antic of his crabbed wit.

LANCIOTTO. It was portentous. All dumb things find tongues
Against this marriage. As I passed the hall,
My armour glittered on the wall, and I
Paused by the harness, as before a friend
Whose well-known features slack our hurried gait;
Francesca's name was fresh upon my mind,
So I half-uttered it. Instant, my sword
Leaped from its scabbard, as with sudden life,
Plunged down and pierced into the oaken floor,
Shivering with fear! Lo! while I gazed upon it—
Doubting the nature of the accident—
Around the point appeared a spot of blood,
Oozing upon the floor, that spread and spread—
As I stood gasping by in speechless horror—
Ring beyond ring, until the odious tide
Crawled to my feet, and lapped them, like the tongues
Of angry serpents! O, my God! I fled
At the first touch of the infernal stain!
Go—you may see—go to the hall!

PAOLO. Fie! man,
You have been ever played on in this sort
By your wild fancies. When your heart is high,
You make them playthings; but in lower moods,
They seem to sap the essence of your soul,
And drain your manhood to its poorest dregs.

LANCIOTTO. Go look, go look!

PAOLO. [*Goes to the door, and returns.*] There sticks the sword, indeed,
Just as your tread detached it from its sheath; Looking more like a blessed cross, I



think,
Than a bad looking omen. As for blood—Ha, ha!
[*Laughing.*]
It sets mine dancing. Pshaw! away with this!
Deck up your face with smiles. Go trim yourself
For the young bride. New velvet, gold, and gems,
Do wonders for us. Brother, come; I'll be
Your tiring-man, for once.

LANCIOTTO. Array this lump—
Paolo, hark! There are some human thoughts
Best left imprisoned in the aching heart,
Lest the freed malefactors should dispread
Infamous ruin with their liberty.
There's not a man—the fairest of ye all—
Who is not fouler than he seems. This life
Is one unending struggle to conceal
Our baseness from our fellows. Here stands one
In vestal whiteness with a lecher's lust;—
There sits a judge, holding law's scales in hands
That itch to take the bribe he dare not touch;—
Here goes a priest with heavenward eyes, whose soul
Is Satan's council-chamber;—there a doctor,
With nature's secrets wrinkled round a brow
Guilty with conscious ignorance;—and here
A soldier rivals Hector's bloody deeds—
Out-does the devil in audacity—
With craven longings fluttering in a heart
That dares do aught but fly! Thus are we all
Mere slaves and alms-men to a scornful world,
That takes us at our seeming.



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PAOLO. Say 'tis true;
What do you drive at?

LANCIOTTO. At myself, full tilt.
I, like the others, am not what I seem.
Men call me gentle, courteous, brave.—They lie!
I'm harsh, rude, and a coward. Had I nerve
To cast my devils out upon the earth,
I'd show this laughing planet what a hell
Of envy, malice, cruelty, and scorn,
It has forced back to canker in the heart
Of one poor cripple!

PAOLO. Ha!

LANCIOTTO. Ay, now 'tis out!
A word I never breathed to man before.
Can you, who are a miracle of grace,
Feel what it is to be a wreck like me?
Paolo, look at me. Is there a line,
In my whole bulk of wretched contraries,
That nature in a nightmare ever used
Upon her shapes till now? Find me the man,
Or beast, or tree, or rock, or nameless thing,
So out of harmony with all things else,
And I'll go raving with bare happiness,—
Ay, and I'll marry Helena of Greece,
And swear I do her honour!

PAOLO. Lanciotto,
I, who have known you from a stripling up,
Never observed, or, if I did, ne'er weighed
Your special difference from the rest of men.
You're not Apollo—

LANCIOTTO. No!

PAOLO. Nor yet are you
A second Pluto. Could I change with you—
My graces for your nobler qualities—
Your strength, your courage, your renown—by heaven,
We'd e'en change persons, to the finest hair.

LANCIOTTO. You should be flatterer to an emperor.



PAOLO. I am but just. Let me beseech you, brother.
To look with greater favour on yourself;
Nor suffer misty phantoms of your brain
To take the place of sound realities.
Go to Ravenna, wed your bride, and lull
Your cruel delusions in domestic peace.
Ghosts fly a fireside; 'tis their wont to stalk
Through empty houses, and through empty hearts.
I know Francesca will be proud of you.
Women admire you heroes. Rusty sages,
Pale poets, and scarred warriors, have been
Their idols ever; while we fair plump fools
Are elbowed to the wall, or only used
For vacant pastime.

LANCIOTTO. To Ravenna?—no!
In Rimini they know me; at Ravenna
I'd be a new-come monster, and exposed
To curious wonder. There will be parade
Of all the usual follies of the state;
Fellows with trumpets, tinselled coats, and wands,
Would strut before me, like vain mountebanks
Before their monkeys. Then, I should be stared
Out of my modesty; and when they look,
How can I tell if 'tis the bridegroom's face
Or hump that draws their eyes? I will not go.
To please you all, I'll marry; but to please
The wonder-mongers of Ravenna—Ha!
Paolo, now I have it. You shall go,
To bring Francesca; and you'll speak of me,
Not as I ought to be, but as I am.
If she draw backward, give her rein; and say
That neither Guido-nor herself shall feel
The weight of my displeasure. You may say,
I pity her—



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PAOLO. For what?

LANCIOTTO. For wedding me.
In sooth, she'll need it. Say—

PAOLO. Nay, Lanciotto,
I'll be a better orator in your behalf,
Without your promptings.

LANCIOTTO. She is fair, 'tis said;
And, dear Paolo, if she please your eye,
And move your heart to anything like love,
Wed her yourself. The peace would stand as firm
By such a match.

PAOLO. [*Laughing.*] Ha! that is right: be gay!
Ply me with jokes! I'd rather see you smile
Than see the sun shine.

LANCIOTTO. I am serious.
I'll find another wife, less beautiful,
More on my level, and—

PAOLO. An empress, brother,
Were honoured by your hand. You are by much
Too humble in your reckoning of yourself.
I can count virtues in you, to supply
Half Italy, if they were parcelled out.
Look up!

LANCIOTTO. I cannot: Heaven has bent me down.
To you, Paolo, I could look, however,
Were my hump made a mountain. Bless him, God!
Pour everlasting bounties on his head!
Make Croesus jealous of his treasury,
Achilles of his arms, Endymion
Of his fresh beauties,—though the coy one lay,
Blushing beneath Diana's earliest kiss,
On grassy Latmos; and may every good,
Beyond man's sight, though in the ken of heaven,
Round his fair fortune to a perfect end!
O, you have dried the sorrow of my eyes;
My heart is beating with a lighter pulse;
The air is musical; the total earth



Puts on new beauty, and within the arms
Of girding ocean dreams her time away,
And visions bright to-morrows!

Enter MALATESTA and PEPE.

MALATESTA. Mount, to horse!

PEPE. [*Aside.*] Good Lord! he's smiling! What's the matter now?
Has anybody broken a leg or back?
Has a more monstrous monster come to life?
Is hell burst open?—heaven burnt up? What, what
Can make yon eyesore grin?—I say, my lord,
What cow has calved?

PAOLO. Your mother, by the bleat.

PEPE. Right fairly answered—for a gentleman!
When did you take my trade up?

PAOLO. When your wit
Went begging, sirrah.

PEPE. Well again! My lord,
I think he'll do.

MALATESTA. For what?

PEPE. To take my place.
Once fools were rare, and then my office sped;
But now the world is overrun with them:
One gets one's fool in one's own family,
Without much searching.

MALATESTA. Pepe, gently now.
Lanciotto, you are waited for. The train
Has passed the gate, and halted there for you.

LANCIOTTO. I go not to Ravenna.

MALATESTA. Hey! why not?

PAOLO. For weighty reasons, father. Will you trust
Your greatest captain, hope of all the Guelfs,
With crafty Guido? Should the Ghibelins
Break faith, and shut Lanciotto in their walls—
Sure the temptation would be great enough—
What would you do?



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MALATESTA. I'd eat Ravenna up!

PEPE. Lord! what an appetite!

PAOLO. But Lanciotto
Would be a precious hostage.

MALATESTA. True; you're wise;
Guido's a fox. Well, have it your own way.
What is your plan?

PAOLO. I go there in his place.

MALATESTA. Good! I will send a letter with the news.

LANCIOTTO. I thank you, brother. [*Apart to PAOLO.*

PEPE. Ha! ha! ha!—O! O! [*Laughing.*

MALATESTA. Pepe, what now?

PEPE. O! lord, O!—ho! ho! ho! [*Laughing.*

PAOLO. Well, giggler?

PEPE. Hear my fable, uncle.

MALATESTA. Ay.

PEPE. Once on a time, Vulcan sent Mercury
To fetch dame Venus from a romp in heaven.
Well, they were long in coming, as he thought;
And so the god of spits and gridirons
Railed like himself—the devil. But—now mark—
Here comes the moral. In a little while,
Vulcan grew proud, because he saw plain signs
That he should be a father; and so he
Strutted through hell, and pushed the devils by,
Like a magnifico of Venice. Ere long,
His heir was born; but then—ho! ho!—the brat
Had wings upon his heels, and thievish ways,
And a vile squint, like errant Mercury's,
Which honest Vulcan could not understand;—
Can you?



PAOLO. 'Sdeath! fool, I'll have you in the stocks.
Father, your fool exceeds his privilege.

PEPE. [*Apart to PAOLO.*] Keep your own bounds, Paolo. In the stocks
I'd tell more fables than you'd wish to hear.
And so ride forth. But, cousin, don't forget
To take Lanciotto's picture to the bride.
Ask her to choose between it and yourself.
I'll count the moments, while she hesitates,
And not grow gray at it.

PAOLO. Peace, varlet, peace!

PEPE. [*Apart to him.*] Ah, now I have it. There's an elephant
Upon the scutcheon; show her that, and say—
Here's Lanciotto in our heraldry!

PAOLO. Here's for your counsel!
[Strikes PEPE, who runs behind MALATESTA.]

MALATESTA. Son, son, have a care!
We who keep pets must bear their pecks sometimes.
Poor knave! Ha! ha! thou'rt growing villainous!

[Laughs and pats PEPE.]

PEPE. Another blow! another life for that! [*Aside.*

PAOLO. Farewell, Lanciotto. You are dull again.

LANCIOTTO. Nature will rule.

MALATESTA. Come, come!

LANCIOTTO. God speed you, brother! I am too sad; my smiles all turn to sighs.



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PAOLO. More cause to haste me on my happy work.
[Exit with MALATESTA.]

PEPE. I'm going, cousin.

LANCIOTTO. Go.

PEPE. Pray, ask me where.

LANCIOTTO. Where, then?

PEPE. To have my jewel carried home:
And, as I'm wise, the carrier shall be
A thief, a thief, by Jove! The fashion's new.

[Exit.]

LANCIOTTO. In truth, I am too gloomy and irrational.
Paolo must be right. I always had
These moody hours and dark presentiments,
Without mischances following after them.
The camp is my abode. A neighing steed,
A fiery onset, and a stubborn fight,
Rouse my dull blood, and tire my body down
To quiet slumbers when the day is o'er,
And night above me spreads her spangled tent,
Lit by the dying cresset of the moon.
Ay, that is it; I'm homesick for the camp.

[Exit.]

ACT II.

SCENE I. *Ravenna. A Room in GUIDO'S Palace. Enter GUIDO and a CARDINAL.*

CARDINAL. I warn thee, Count.

GUIDO. I'll take the warning, father,
On one condition: show me but a way
For safe escape.

CARDINAL. I cannot.



GUIDO. There's the point.
We Ghibelins are fettered hand and foot.
There's not a florin in my treasury;
Not a lame soldier, I can lead to war;
Not one to man the walls. A present siege,
Pushed with the wonted heat of Lanciotto,
Would deal Ravenna such a mortal blow
As ages could not mend. Give me but time
To fill the drained arteries of the land.
The Guelfs are masters, we their slaves; and we
Were wiser to confess it, ere the lash
Teach it too sternly. It is well for you
To say you love Francesca. So do I;
But neither you nor I have any voice
For or against this marriage.

CARDINAL. 'Tis too true.

GUIDO. Say we refuse: Why, then, before a week,
We'll hear Lanciotto rapping at our door,
With twenty hundred ruffians at his back.
What's to say then? My lord, we waste our breath.
Let us look fortune in the face, and draw
Such comfort from the wanton as we may.

CARDINAL. And yet I fear—

GUIDO. You fear! and so do I.
I fear Lanciotto as a soldier, though,
More than a son-in-law.

CARDINAL. But have you seen him?

GUIDO. Ay, ay, and felt him, too. I've seen him ride
The best battalions of my horse and foot
Down like mere stubble: I have seen his sword
Hollow a square of pikemen, with the ease
You'd scoop a melon out.



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CARDINAL. Report declares him
A prodigy of strength and ugliness.

GUIDO. Were he the devil—But why talk of this?—
Here comes Francesca.

CARDINAL. Ah! unhappy child!

GUIDO. Look you, my lord! you'll make the best of it;
You will not whimper. Add your voice to mine,
Or woe to poor Ravenna!

Enter FRANCESCA and RITTA.

FRANCESCA. Ha! my lord—
And you, my father!—But do I intrude
Upon your counsels? How severe you look!
Shall I retire?

GUIDO. No, no.

FRANCESCA. You moody men
Seem leagued against me. As I passed the hall,
I met your solemn Dante, with huge strides
Pacing in measure to his stately verse.
The sweeping sleeves of his broad scarlet robe
Blew out behind, like wide-expanded wings,
And seemed to buoy him in his level flight.
Thinking to pass, without disturbing him,
I stole on tip-toe; but the poet paused,
Subsiding into man, and steadily
Bent on my face the lustre of his eyes.
Then, taking both my trembling hands in his—
You know how his God-troubled forehead awes—
He looked into my eyes, and shook his head,
As if he dared not speak of what he saw;
Then muttered, sighed, and slowly turned away
The weight of his intolerable brow.
When I glanced back, I saw him, as before,
Sailing adown the hall on out-spread wings.
Indeed, my lord, he should not do these things;
They strain the weakness of mortality
A jot too far. As for poor Ritta, she
Fled like a doe, the truant.



RITTA. Yes, forsooth:
There's something terrible about the man.
Ugh! if he touched me, I should turn to ice.
I wonder if Count Lanciotto looks—

GUIDO. Ritta, come here. [*Takes her apart.*]

RITTA. My lord.

GUIDO. 'Twas my command,
You should say nothing of Count Lanciotto.

RITTA. Nothing, my lord.

GUIDO. You have said nothing, then?

RITTA. Indeed, my lord.

GUIDO. 'Tis well. Some years ago,
My daughter had a very silly maid,
Who told her sillier stories. So, one day,
This maiden whispered something I forbade—
In strictest confidence, for she was sly:
What happened, think you?

RITTA. I know not, my lord.

GUIDO. I boiled her in a pot.

RITTA. Good heaven! my lord.

GUIDO. She did not like it. I shall keep that pot
Ready for the next boiling.

[*Walks back to the others.*]

RITTA. Saints above!
I wonder if he ate her! Boil me—me!
I'll roast or stew with pleasure; but to boil
Implies a want of tenderness,—or rather
A downright toughness—in the matter boiled,
That's slanderous to a maiden. What, boil me—
Boil me! O! mercy, how ridiculous!



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[Retires, laughing.]

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER. Letters, my lord, from great Prince Malatesta.
[Presents them, and exit.]

GUIDO. *[Aside.]* Hear him, ye gods!—"from great Prince Malatesta!"
Greeting, no doubt, his little cousin Guido. Well, well, just so we see-saw up and down.
[Reads.]

*"Fearing our treachery,"—by heaven, that's blunt,
And Malatesta-like!—"he will not send
His son, Lanciotto, to Ravenna, but"—
But what?—a groom, a porter? or will he
Have his prey sent him in an iron cage?
By Jove, he shall not have her! O! no, no;
"He sends his younger son, the Count Paolo,
To fetch Francesca back to Rimini."
That's well, if he had left his reasons out.
And, in a postscript—by the saints, 'tis droll!—
"Twould not be worth your lordship's while to shut
Paolo in a prison; for, my lord,
I'll only pay his ransom in plain steel:
Besides, he's not worth having." Is there one,
Save this ignoble offshoot of the Goths,
Who'd write such garbage to a gentleman?
Take that, and read it. *[Gives letter to CARDINAL.]**

CARDINAL. I have done the most.
She seems suspicious.

GUIDO. Ritta's work.

CARDINAL. Farewell!

FRANCESCA. Father, you seem distempered.

GUIDO. No, my child,
I am but vexed. Your husband's on the road,
Close to Ravenna. What's the time of day?

FRANCESCA. Past noon, my lord.

GUIDO. We must be stirring, then.



FRANCESCA. I do not like this marriage.

GUIDO. But I do.

FRANCESCA. But I do not. Poh! to be given away,
Like a fine horse or falcon, to a man
Whose face I never saw!

RITTA. That's it, my lady.

GUIDO. Ritta, run down, and see if my great pot
Boils to your liking.

RITTA. [*Aside.*] O! that pot again!
My lord, my heart betrays me; but you know
How true 'tis to my lady. [*Exit.*]

FRANCESCA. What ails Ritta?

GUIDO. The ailing of your sex, a running tongue.
Francesca, 'tis too late to beat retreat:
Old Malatesta has me—you, too, child—
Safe in his clutch. If you are not content,
I must uncloset Ravenna, and allow
His son to take you. Poh, poh! have a soul
Equal with your estate. A prince's child
Cannot choose husbands. Her desires must aim,
Not at herself, but at the public good.
Both as your prince and father, I command;
As subject and good daughter, you'll obey.

FRANCESCA. I knew that it must be my destiny,
Some day, to give my hand without my heart;
But—



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GUIDO. But, and I will but you back again!
When Guido da Polenta says to you,
Daughter, you must be married,—what were best?

FRANCESCA. 'Twere best Francesca, of the self-same name,
Made herself bridal garments. [*Laughing.*

GUIDO. Right!

FRANCESCA. My lord,
Is Lanciotto handsome—ugly—fair—
Black—sallow—crabbed—kind—or what is he?

GUIDO. You'll know ere long. I could not alter him,
To please your taste.

FRANCESCA. You always put me off;
You never have a whisper in his praise.

GUIDO. The world reports it.—Count my soldiers' scars,
And you may sum Lanciotto's glories up.

FRANCESCA. I shall be dutiful, to please you, father.
If aught befall me through my blind submission,
Though I may suffer, you must bear the sin.
Beware, my lord, for your own peace of mind!
My part has been obedience; and now
I play it over to complete my task;
And it shall be with smiles upon my lips,—
Heaven only knows with what a sinking heart!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

The Same. Before the Gates of the City. The walls hung with banners, flowers, etc., and crowded with citizens. At the side of the scene is a canopied dais, with chairs of state upon it. Music, bells, shouts, and other sounds of rejoicing, are occasionally heard. Enter GUIDO, the CARDINAL, NOBLEMEN, KNIGHTS, GUARDS, etc., with banners, arms, etc.

GUIDO. My lord, I'll have it so. You talk in vain.
Paolo is a marvel in his way:
I've seen him often. If Francesca take



A fancy to his beauty, all the better;
For she may think that he and Lanciotto
Are like as blossoms of one parent branch.
In truth, they are, so far as features go—
Heaven help the rest! Get her to Rimini,
By any means, and I shall be content.
The fraud cannot last long; but long enough
To win her favour to the family.

CARDINAL. Tis a dull trick. Thou hast not dealt with her
Wisely nor kindly, and I dread the end.
If, when this marriage was enjoined on thee,
Thou hadst informed Francesca of the truth,
And said, Now daughter, choose between
Thy peace and all Ravenna's; who that knows
The constant nature of her noble heart
Could doubt the issue? There'd have been some tears,
Some frightful fancies of her husband's looks;
And then she'd calmly walk up to her fate,
And bear it bravely. Afterwards, perchance,
Lanciotto might prove better than her fears,—
No one denies him many an excellence,—
And all go happily. But, as thou wouldst plot,
She'll be prepared to see a paragon,
And find a satyr. It is dangerous.
Treachery with enemies is bad enough,
With friends 'tis fatal.



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GUIDO. Has your lordship done?

CARDINAL. Never, Count Guido, with so good a text.
Do not stand looking sideways at the truth;
Craft has become thy nature. Go to her.

GUIDO. I have not heart.

CARDINAL. I have. [*Going.*]

GUIDO. Hold, Cardinal!
My plan is better. Get her off my hands,
And I care not.

CARDINAL. What will she say of thee,
In Rimini, when she detects the cheat?

GUIDO. I'll stop my ears up.

CARDINAL. Guido, thou art weak,
And lack the common fortitude of man.

GUIDO. And you abuse the license of your garb,
To lesson me. My lord, I do not dare
To move a finger in these marriage-rites.
Francesca is a sacrifice, I know,—
A limb delivered to the surgeon's knife,
To save our general health. A truce to this.
Paolo has the business in his hands:
Let him arrange it as he will; for I
Will give Count Malatesta no pretext
To recommence the war.

CARDINAL. Farewell, my lord.
I'll neither help nor countenance a fraud.
You crafty men take comfort to yourselves,
Saying, deceit dies with discovery.
'Tis false; each wicked action spawns a brood,
And lives in its succession. You, who shake
Man's moral nature into storm, should know
That the last wave which passes from your sight
Rolls in and breaks upon eternity! [*Exit.*]



GUIDO. Why, that's a very grand and solemn thought:
I'll mention it to Dante. Gentlemen,
What see they from the wall?

NOBLEMAN. The train, my lord.

GUIDO. Inform my daughter.

NOBLEMAN. She is here, my lord.

Enter FRANCESCA, RITTA, LADIES, ATTENDANTS, etc.

FRANCESCA. See, father, what a merry face I have,
And how my ladies glisten! I will try
To do my utmost, in my love for you
And the good people of Ravenna. Now,
As the first shock is over, I expect
To feel quite happy. I will wed the Count,
Be he whate'er he may. I do not speak
In giddy recklessness. I've weighed it all,—
'Twixt hope and fear, knowledge and ignorance,—
And reasoned out my duty to your wish.
I have no yearnings towards another love:
So, if I show my husband a desire
To fill the place with which he honours me,
According to its duties, even he—
Were he less noble than Count Lanciotto—
Must smile upon my efforts, and reward
Good will with willing grace. One pang remains.
Parting from home and kindred is a thing
None but the heartless, or the miserable,
Can do without a tear. This home of mine
Has filled my heart with two-fold happiness,
Taking and giving love abundantly.
Farewell, Ravenna! If I bless thee not,
Tis that thou seem'st too blessed; and 'twere strange
In me to offer what thou'st always given.



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GUIDO. [*Aside.*] This is too much! If she would rail a while
At me and fortune, it could be endured. [*Shouts, music, etc., within.*]

FRANCESCA. Ha! there's the van just breaking through the wood!
Music! that's well; a welcome forerunner.
Now, Ritta—here—come talk to me. Alas!
How my heart trembles! What a world to me
Lies 'neath the glitter of yon cavalcade!
Is that the Count?

RITTA. Upon the dapple-gray?

FRANCESCA. Yes, yes.

RITTA. No; that's his—

GUIDO. [*Apart to her.*] Ritta!

RITTA. Ay; that's—that's—

GUIDO. Ritta, the pot! [*Apart to her.*]

RITTA. O! but this lying chokes! [*Aside.*]
Ay, that's Count Somebody, from Rimini.

FRANCESCA. I knew it was. Is that not glorious?

RITTA. My lady, what?

FRANCESCA. To see a cavalier
Sit on his steed with such familiar grace.

RITTA. To see a man astraddle on a horse!
It don't seem much to me.

FRANCESCA. Fie! stupid girl!
But mark the minstrels thronging round the Count!
Ah! that is more than gallant horsemanship.
The soul that feeds itself on poesy,
Is of a quality more fine and rare
Than Heaven allows the ruder multitude.
I tell you, Ritta, when you see a man
Beloved by poets, made the theme of song,
And chaunted down to ages, as a gift
Fit for the rich embalmment of their verse,



There's more about him than the patron's gold.
If that's the gentleman my father chose,
He must have picked him out from all the world.
The Count alights. Why, what a noble grace
Runs through his slightest action! Are you sad?
You, too, my father? Have I given you cause?
I am content. If Lanciotto's mind
Bear any impress of his fair outside,
We shall not quarrel ere our marriage-day.
Can I say more? My blushes speak for me:
Interpret them as modesty's excuse
For the short-comings of a maiden's speech.

RITTA. Alas! dear lady! [*Aside.*]

GUIDO. [*Aside.*] 'Sdeath! my plot has failed,
By overworking its design. Come, come;
Get to your places. See, the Count draws nigh.

GUIDO and FRANCESCA seat themselves upon the dais, surrounded by RITTA, LADIES, ATTENDANTS, GUARDS, etc. Music, shouts, ringing of bells, etc. Enter MEN-AT-ARMS, with banners, etc.; PAGES bearing costly presents on cushions; then PAOLO, surrounded by NOBLEMEN, KNIGHTS, MINSTRELS, etc., and followed by other MEN-AT-ARMS. They range themselves opposite the dais.

GUIDO. Ravenna welcomes you, my lord, and I
Add my best greeting to the general voice.
This peaceful show of arms from Rimini
Is a new pleasure, stranger to our sense
Than if the East blew zephyrs, or the balm
Of Summer loaded rough December's gales,
And turned his snows to roses.



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PAOLO. Noble sir,
We looked for welcome from your courtesy,
Not from your love; but this unhop'd for sight
Of smiling faces, and the gentle tone
In which you greet us, leave us naught to win
Within your hearts. I need not ask, my lord,
Where bides the precious object of my search;
For I was sent to find the fairest maid
Ravenna boasts, among her many fair.
I might extend my travel many a league,
And yet return, to take her from your side.
I blush to bear so rich a treasure home,
As pledge and hostage of a sluggish peace;
For beauty such as hers was meant by Heaven
To spur our race to gallant enterprise,
And draw contending deities around
The dubious battles of a second Troy.

GUIDO. Sir Count, you please to lavish on my child
The high-strained courtesy of chivalry;
Yet she has homely virtues that, I hope,
May take a deeper hold in Rimini,
After the fleeting beauty of her face
Is spoiled by time, or faded to the eye
By its familiar usage.

PAOLO. As a man
Who ever sees Heaven's purpose in its works,
I must suppose so rare a tabernacle
Was framed for rarest virtues. Pardon me
My public admiration. If my praise
Clash with propriety, and bare my words
To cooler judgment, 'tis not that I wish
To win a flatterer's grudged recompense,
And gain by falsehood what I'd win through love.
When I have brushed my travel from my garb,
I'll pay my court in more befitting style.

Music. Exit with his train.

GUIDO. [*Advancing.*] Now, by the saints, Lanciotto's deputy
Stands in this business with a proper grace,
Stretching his lord's instructions till they crack.
A zealous envoy! Not a word said he



Of Lanciotto—not a single word:
But stood there, staring in Francesca's face
With his devouring eyes.—By Jupiter,
I but half like it!

FRANCESCA. [*Advancing.*] Father?

GUIDO. Well, my child.

FRANCESCA. How do you like—

GUIDO. The coxcomb! I've done well!

FRANCESCA. No, no; Count Lanciotto?

GUIDO. Well enough.
But hang this fellow—hang your deputies!
I'll never woo by proxy.

FRANCESCA. Deputies!
And woo by proxy!

GUIDO. Come to me anon.
I'll strip this cuckoo of his gallantry!
[Exit with GUARDS, etc.]

FRANCESCA. Ritta, my father has strange ways of late.

RITTA. I wonder not.

FRANCESCA. You wonder not?

RITTA. No, lady:
He is so used to playing double games,
That even you must come in for your share.
Plague on his boiling! I will out with it. [*Aside.*]
Lady, the gentleman who passed the gates—



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FRANCESCA. Count Lanciotto? As I hope for grace,
A gallant gentleman! How well he spoke!
With what sincere and earnest courtesy
The rounded phrases glided from his lips!
He spoke in compliments that seemed like truth.
Methinks I'd listen through a summer's day,
To hear him woo.—And he must woo to me—
I'll have our privilege—he must woo a space,
Ere I'll be won, I promise.

RITTA. But, my lady,
He'll woo you for another.

FRANCESCA. He?—ha! ha! [*Laughing.*]
I should not think it from the prologue, Ritta.

RITTA. Nor I.

FRANCESCA. Nor any one.

RITTA. 'Tis not the Count—
'Tis not Count Lanciotto.

FRANCESCA. Gracious saints!
Have you gone crazy? Ritta, speak again,
Before I chide you.

RITTA. 'Tis the solemn truth.
That gentleman is Count Paolo, lady,
Brother to Lanciotto, and no more
Like him than—than—

FRANCESCA. Than what?

RITTA. Count Guido's pot,
For boiling waiting-maids, is like the bath
Of Venus on the arras.

FRANCESCA. Are you mad,—
Quite mad, poor Ritta?

RITTA. Yes; perhaps I am.
Perhaps Lanciotto is a proper man—
Perhaps I lie—perhaps I speak the truth—



Perhaps I gabble like a fool. O! heavens,
That dreadful pot!

FRANCESCA. Dear Ritta!—

RITTA. By the mass,
They shall not cozen you, my gentle mistress!
If my lord Guido boiled me, do you think
I should be served up to the garrison,
By way of pottage? Surely they would not waste me.

FRANCESCA. You are an idle talker. Pranks like these
Fit your companions. You forget yourself.

RITTA. Not you, though, lady. Boldly I repeat,
That he who looked so fair, and talked so sweet,
Who rode from Rimini upon a horse
Of dapple-gray, and walked through yonder gate,
Is not Count Lanciotto.

FRANCESCA. This you mean?

RITTA. I do, indeed!

FRANCESCA. Then I am more abused—
More tricked, more trifled with, more played upon—
By him, my father, and by all of you,
Than anything, suspected of a heart,
Was ever yet!

RITTA. In Count Paolo, lady,
Perchance there was no meditated fraud.

FRANCESCA. How, dare you plead for him?

RITTA. I but suppose:
Though in your father—O! I dare not say.



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FRANCESCA. I dare. It was ill usage, gross abuse,
Treason to duty, meanness, craft—dishonour!
What if I'd thrown my heart before the feet
Of this sham husband! cast my love away
Upon a counterfeit! I was prepared
To force affection upon any man
Called Lanciotto. Anything of silk,
Tinsel, and gewgaws, if he bore that name,
Might have received me for the asking. Yes,
I was inclined to venture more than half
In this base business—shame upon my thoughts!—
All for my father's peace and poor Ravenna's.
And this Paolo, with his cavalcade,
His minstrels, music, and his pretty airs,
His showy person, and his fulsome talk,
Almost made me contented with my lot.
O! what a fool—in faith, I merit it—
Trapped by mere glitter! What an easy fool!
Ha! ha! I'm glad it went no further, girl;

[*Laughing.*]

I'm glad I kept my heart safe, after all.
There was my cunning. I have paid them back,
I warrant you! I'll marry Lanciotto;
I'll seem to shuffle by this treachery. No!
I'll seek my father, put him face to face
With his own falsehood; and I'll stand between,
Awful as justice, meting out to him
Heaven's dreadful canons 'gainst his conscious guilt.
I'll marry Lanciotto. On my faith,
I would not live another wicked day
Here, in Ravenna, only for the fear
That I should take to lying, with the rest.
Ha! ha! it makes me merry, when I think
How safe I kept this little heart of mine! [*Laughing.*]
[*Exit, with ATTENDANTS, etc.*]

RITTA. So, 'tis all ended—all except my boiling,
And that will make a holiday for some.
Perhaps I'm selfish. Fagot, axe, and gallows,
They have their uses, after all. They give
The lookers-on a deal of harmless sport.
Though one may suffer, twenty hundred laugh;



And that's a point gained. I have seen a man—
Poor Dora's uncle—shake himself with glee,
At the bare thought of the ridiculous style
In which some villain died. "Dancing," quoth he,
"To the poor music of a single string!
Biting," quoth he, "after his head was off!
What use of that?" Or, "Shivering," quoth he,
"As from an ague, with his beard afire!"
And then he'd roar until his ugly mouth
Split at the corners. But to see me boil—
that will be the queerest thing of all!
I wonder if they'll put me in a bag,
Like a great suet-ball? I'll go, and tell
Count Guido, on the instant. How he'll laugh
To think his pot has got an occupant!
I wonder if he really takes delight
In such amusements? Nay, I have kept faith;
I only said the man was not Lanciotto;
No word of Lanciotto's ugliness.
I may escape the pot, for all. Pardee!
I wonder if they'll put me in a bag!

[Exit, laughing.]



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SCENE III.

The Same. A Room in GUIDO'S Palace. Enter GUIDO and RITTA.

RITTA. There now, my lord, that is the whole of it:
I love my mistress more than I fear you.
If I could save her finger from the axe,
I'd give my head to do it. So, my lord,
I am prepared to stew.

GUIDO. Boil, Ritta, boil.

RITTA. No; I prefer to stew.

GUIDO. And I to boil.

RITTA. Tis very hard, my lord, I cannot choose
My way of cooking. I shall laugh, I vow,
In the grim headsman's face, when I remember
That I am dying for my lady's love.
I leave no one to shed a tear for me;
Father nor mother, kith nor kin, have I,
To say, "Poor Ritta!" o'er my lifeless clay.
They all have gone before me, and 'twere well
If I could hurry after them.

GUIDO. Poor child. [*Aside.*]
But, baggage, said you aught of Lanciotto?

RITTA. No, not a word; and he's so ugly, too!

GUIDO. Is he so ugly?

RITTA. Ugly! he is worse
Than Pilate on the hangings.

GUIDO. Hold your tongue
Here, and at Rimini, about the Count,
And you shall prosper.

RITTA. Am I not to boil?

GUIDO. No, child. But be discreet at Rimini.
Old Malatesta is a dreadful man—



Far worse than I—he bakes his people, Ritta;
Lards them, like geese, and bakes them in an oven.

RITTA. Fire is my fate, I see that.

GUIDO. Have a care
It do not follow you beyond this world.
Where is your mistress?

RITTA. In her room, my lord.
After I told her of the Count Paolo,
She flew to have an interview with you;
But on the way—I know not why it was—
She darted to her chamber, and there stays
Weeping in silence. It would do you good—
More than a hundred sermons—just to see
A single tear, indeed it would, my lord.

GUIDO. Ha! you are saucy. I have honoured you
Past prudence, malpert! Get you to your room!

[Exit RITTA.]

More of my blood runs in yon damsel's veins
Than the world knows. Her mother to a shade;
The same high spirit, and strange martyr-wish
To sacrifice herself, body and soul,
For some loved end. All that she did for me;
And yet I loved her not. O! memory!
The darkest future has a ray of hope,
But thou art blacker than the sepulchre!
Thy horrid shapes lie round, like scattered bones,
Hopeless forever! I am sick at heart.
The past crowds on the present: as I sowed,
So am I reaping. Shadows from myself
Fall on the picture, as I trace anew
These rising spectres of my early life,
And add their gloom to what was dark before.
O! memory, memory! How my temples throb! [Sits.]



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Enter FRANCESCA, *hastily*.

FRANCESCA. My lord, this outrage—
[*He looks up.*]

Father, are you ill?

You seem unhappy. Have I troubled you?
You heard how passionate and bad I was,
When Ritta told me of the Count Paolo.
Dear father, calm yourself; and let me ask
A child's forgiveness. 'Twas undutiful
To doubt your wisdom. It is over now.
I only thought you might have trusted me
With any counsel.

GUIDO. [*Aside.*] Would I had!

FRANCESCA. Ah! well,
I understand it all, and you were right.
Only the danger of it. Think, my lord,
If I had loved this man at the first sight:
We all have heard of such things. Think, again,
If I had loved him—as I then supposed
You wished me to—'twould have been very sad.
But no, dear sir, I kept my heart secure,
Nor will I loose it till you give the word.
I'm wiser than you thought me, you perceive.
But when we saw him, face to face, together,
Surely you might have told me then.

GUIDO. Francesca,
My eyes are old—I did not clearly see—Faith,
it escaped my thoughts. Some other things
Came in my head. I was as ignorant
Of Count Paolo's coming as yourself.
The brothers are so like.

FRANCESCA. Indeed?

GUIDO. Yes, yes.
One is the other's counterpart, in fact;
And even now it may not be—O! shame!
I lie by habit. [*Aside.*]



FRANCESCA. Then there is a hope?
He may be Lanciotto, after all?
O! joy—

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. The Count Paolo. [*Exit.*

FRANCESCA. Misery!
That name was not Lanciotto!

GUIDO. Farewell, child.
I'll leave you with the Count: he'll make it plain.
It seems 'twas Count Paolo. [*Going.*

FRANCESCA. Father!

GUIDO. Well.

FRANCESCA. You knew it from the first! [*Exit GUIDO.*]
Let me begone:
I could not look him in the face again
With the old faith. Besides, 'twould anger him
To have a living witness of his fraud
Ever before him; and I could not trust—
Strive as I might—my happiness to him,
As once I did. I could not lay my hand
Upon his shoulder, and look up to him,
Saying, Dear father, pilot me along
Past this dread rock, through yonder narrow strait.
Saints, no! The gold that gave my life away
Might, even then, be rattling in his purse,
Warm from the buyer's hand. Look on me, Heaven!
Him thou didst sanctify before my eyes,
Him thou didst charge, as thy great deputy,
With guardianship of a weak orphan girl,



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Has fallen from grace, has paltered with his trust;
I have no mother to receive thy charge,—
O! take it on thyself; and when I err,
Through mortal blindness, Heaven, be thou my guide!
Worse cannot fall me. Though my husband lack
A parent's tenderness, he yet may have
Faith, truth, and honour—the immortal bonds
That knit together honest hearts as one.
Let me away to Rimini. Alas!
It wrings my heart to have outlived the day
That I can leave my home with no regret! [*Weeps.*]

Enter PAOLO.

PAOLO. Pray, pardon me. [*Going.*]

FRANCESCA. You are quite welcome, Count
A foolish tear, a weakness, nothing more:
But present weeping clears our future sight.
They tell me you are love's commissioner,
A kind of broker in the trade of hearts:
Is it your usual business? or may I
Flatter myself, by claiming this essay
As your first effort?

PAOLO. Lady, I believed
My post, at starting, one of weight and trust;
When I beheld you, I concluded it
A charge of honour and high dignity.
I did not think to hear you underrate
Your own importance, by dishonouring me.

FRANCESCA. You are severe, my lord.

PAOLO. No, not severe;
Say candid, rather. I am somewhat hurt
By my reception. If I feel the wound,
'Tis not because I suffer from the jest,
But that your lips should deal it.



FRANCESCA. Compliments
Appear to be the staple of your speech.
You ravish one with courtesy, you pour
Fine words upon one, till the listening head
Is bowed with sweetness. Sir, your talk is drugged;
There's secret poppy in your sugared phrase:
I'll taste before I take it.

PAOLO. Gentle lady—

FRANCESCA. I am not gentle, or I missed my aim.
I am no hawk to fly at every lure.
You courtly gentlemen draw one broad rule—
All girls are fools. It may be so, in truth,
Yet so I'll not be treated.

PAOLO. Have you been?
If I implied such slander by my words,
They wrong my purpose. If I compliment,
'Tis not from habit, but because I thought
Your face deserved my homage as its due.
When I have clearer insight, and you spread
Your inner nature o'er your lineaments,
Even that face may darken in the shades
Of my opinion. For mere loveliness
Needs inward light to keep it always bright.
All things look badly to unfriendly eyes.
I spoke my first impression; cooler thought
May work strange changes.

FRANCESCA. Ah, Sir Count, at length
There's matter in your words.

PAOLO. Unpleasant stuff,
To judge by your dark brows. I have essayed
Kindness and coldness, yet you are not pleased.



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FRANCESCA. How can I be?

PAOLO. How, lady?

FRANCESCA. Ay, sir, how?

Your brother—my good lord that is to be—
Stings me with his neglect; and in the place
He should have filled, he sends a go-between,
A common carrier of others' love;
How can the sender, or the person sent,
Please overmuch? Now, were I such as you,
I'd be too proud to travel round the land
With other people's feelings in my heart;
Even to fill the void which you confess
By such employment.

PAOLO. Lady, 'tis your wish
To nettle me, to break my breeding down,
And see what natural passions I have hidden
Behind the outworks of my etiquette.
I neither own nor feel the want of heart
With which you charge me. You are more than cruel;
You rouse my nerves until they ache with life,
And then pour fire upon them. For myself
I would not speak, unless you had compelled.
My task is odious to me. Since I came,
Heaven bear me witness how my traitor heart
Has fought against my duty; and how oft
I wished myself in Lanciotto's place.
Or him in mine.

FRANCESCA. You riddle.

PAOLO. Do I? Well,
Let it remain unguessed.

FRANCESCA. You wished yourself
At Rimini, or Lanciotto here?
You may have reasons.

PAOLO. Well interpreted!
The Sphinx were simple in your skilful hands!

FRANCESCA. It has become your turn to sneer.



PAOLO. But I
Have gall to feed my bitterness, while you
Jest in the wanton ease of happiness.
Stop! there is peril in our talk.

FRANCESCA. As how?

PAOLO. 'Tis dangerous to talk about one's self;
It panders selfishness. My duty waits.

FRANCESCA. My future lord's affairs? I quite forgot
Count Lanciotto.

PAOLO. I, too, shame upon me. [*Aside.*

FRANCESCA. Does he resemble you?

PAOLO. Pray drop me, lady.

FRANCESCA. Nay, answer me.

PAOLO. Somewhat—in feature.

FRANCESCA. Ha!
Is he so fair?

PAOLO. No, darker. He was tanned
In long campaigns, and battles hotly fought,
While I lounged idly with the troubadours,
Under the shadow of his watchful sword.

FRANCESCA. In person?

PAOLO. He is shorter, I believe,
But broader, stronger, more compactly knit.

FRANCESCA. What of his mind?



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PAOLO. Ah, now you strike the key!
A mind just fitted to his history,
An equal balance 'twixt desert and fame.
No future chronicler shall say of him,
His fame outran his merit; or his merit
Halted behind some adverse circumstance,
And never won the glory it deserved.
My love might weary you, if I rehearsed
The simple beauty of his character;
His grandeur and his gentleness of heart,
His warlike fire and peaceful love, his faith,
His courtesy, his truth. I'll not deny
Some human weakness, to attract our love,
Harbours in him, as in the rest of us.
Sometimes against our city's enemies
He thunders in the distance, and devotes
Their homes to ruin. When the brand has fallen,
He ever follows with a healing rain,
And in his pity shoulders by revenge.
A thorough soldier, lady. He grasps crowns,
While I pick at the laurel.

FRANCESCA. Stay, my lord!
I asked your brother's value, with no wish
To hear you underrate yourself. Your worth
May rise in passing through another's lips.
Lanciotto is perfection, then?

PAOLO. To me:
Others may think my brother over-nice
Upon the point of honour; over-keen
To take offence where no offence is meant;
A thought too prodigal of human life,
Holding it naught when weighed against a wrong;
Suspicious of the motives of his friends;
Distrustful of his own high excellence;
And with a certain gloom of temperament,
When thus disturbed, that makes him terrible
And rash in action. I have heard of this;
I never felt it. I distress you, lady?
Perhaps I throw these points too much in shade,
By catching at an enemy's report.
But, then, Lanciotto said, "You'll speak of me,



Not as I ought to be, but as I am.”
He loathes deceit.

FRANCESCA. That’s noble! Have you done?
I have observed a strange reserve, at times,
An over-carefulness in choosing words,
Both in my father and his nearest friends,
When speaking of your brother; as if they
Picked their way slowly over rocky ground,
Fearing to stumble. Ritta, too, my maid,
When her tongue rattles on in full career,
Stops at your brother’s name, and with a sigh
Settles herself to dismal silence. Count,
These things have troubled me. From you I look
For perfect frankness. Is there naught withheld?

PAOLO. [*Aside.*] O base temptation! What if I betray
His crippled person—imitate his limp—
Laugh at his hip, his back, his sullen moods
Of childish superstition?—tread his heart
Under my feet, to climb into his place?—Use
his own warrant ’gainst himself; and say,
Because I loved her, and misjudged your jest,
Therefore I stole her? Why, a common thief
Would hang for just such thinking! Ha! ha! ha!
[*Laughing.*]
I reckon on her love, as if I held
The counsels of her bosom. No, I swear,
Francesca would despise so mean a deed.
Have I no honour either? Are my thoughts
All bound by her opinions?



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FRANCESCA. This is strange!
Is Lanciotto's name a spell to all?
I ask a simple question, and straight you
Start to one side, and mutter to yourself,
And laugh, and groan, and play the lunatic,
In such a style that you astound me more
Than all the others. It appears to me
I have been singled as a common dupe
By every one. What mystery is this
Surrounds Count Lanciotto? If there be
A single creature in the universe
Who has a right to know him as he is,
I am that one.

PAOLO. I grant it. You shall see,
And shape your judgment by your own remark.
All that my honour calls for I have said.

FRANCESCA. I am content. Unless I greatly err,
Heaven made your breast the seat of honest thoughts.
You know, my lord, that, once at Rimini,
There can be no retreat for me. By you,
Here at Ravenna, in your brother's name,
I shall be solemnly betrothed. And now
I thus extend my maiden hand to you;
If you are conscious of no secret guilt,
Take it.

PAOLO. I do. [*Takes her hand.*]

FRANCESCA. You tremble!

PAOLO. With the hand,
Not with the obligation.

FRANCESCA. Farewell, Count!
'Twere cruel to tax your stock of compliments,
That waste their sweets upon a trammelled heart;
Go fly your fancies at some freer game. [*Exit.*]

PAOLO. O, Heaven, if I have faltered and am weak,
Tis from my nature! Fancies, more accursed
Than haunt a murderer's bedside, throng my brain—
Temptations, such as mortal never bore



Since Satan whispered in the ear of Eve,
Sing in my ear—and all, all are accursed!
At heart I have betrayed my brother's trust,
Francesca's openly. Turn where I will,
As if enclosed within a mirrored hall,
I see a traitor. Now to stand erect,
Firm on my base of manly constancy;
Or, if I stagger, let me never quit
The homely path of duty, for the ways
That bloom and glitter with seductive sin! *[Exit.*

ACT III

SCENE I. *Rimini. A Room in the Castle.* LANCIOTTO *discovered reading.*

LANCIOTTO. O! fie, philosophy! This Seneca
Revels in wealth, and whines about the poor!
Talks of starvation while his banquet waits,
And fancies that a two hours' appetite
Throws light on famine! Doubtless he can tell,
As he skips nimbly through his dancing-girls,
How sad it is to limp about the world
A sightless cripple! Let him feel the crutch
Wearing against his heart, and then I'd hear
This sage talk glibly; or provide a pad,
Stuffed with his soft philosophy, to ease
His aching shoulder. Pshaw! he never felt,
Or pain would choke his frothy utterance.



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'Tis easy for the doctor to compound
His nauseous simples for a sick man's health;
But let him swallow them, for his disease,
Without wry faces. Ah! the tug is there.
Show me philosophy in rags, in want,
Sick of a fever, with a back like mine,
Creeping to wisdom on these legs, and I
Will drink its comforts. Out! away with you!
There's no such thing as real philosophy!

[Throws down the book.]

[Enter PEPE.]

Here is a sage who'll teach a courtier
The laws of etiquette, a statesman rule,
A soldier discipline, a poet verse,
And each mechanic his distinctive trade;
Yet bring him to his motley, and how wide
He shoots from reason! We can understand
All business but our own, and thrust advice
In every gaping cranny of the world;
While habit shapes us to our own dull work,
And reason nods above his proper task.
Just so philosophy would rectify
All things abroad, and be a jade at home.
Pepe, what think you of the Emperor's aim
Towards Hungary?

PEPE. A most unwise design;
For mark, my lord—

LANCIOTTO. Why, there! the fact cries out.
Here's motley thinking for a diadem!—
Ay, and more wisely in his own regard.

PEPE. You flout me, cousin.

LANCIOTTO. Have you aught that's new?—
Some witty trifle, some absurd conceit?



PEPE. Troth, no.

LANCIOTTO. Why not give up the Emperor,
And bend your wisdom on your duties, Pepe?

PEPE. Because the Emperor has more need of wisdom
Than the most barren fool of wit.

LANCIOTTO. Well said!
Mere habit brings the fool back to his art.
This jester is a rare philosopher.
Teach me philosophy, good fool.

PEPE. No need.
You'll get a teacher when you take a wife.
If she do not instruct you in more arts
Than Aristotle ever thought upon,
The good old race of woman has declined
Into a sort of male stupidity.
I had a sweetheart once, she lectured grandly;
No matter on what subject she might hit,
T was all the same, she could talk and she would.
She had no silly modesty; she dashed
Straight in the teeth of any argument,
And talked you deaf, dumb, blind. Whatever struck
Upon her ear, by some machinery,
Set her tongue wagging. Thank the Lord, she died!—
Dropped in the middle of a fierce harangue,
Like a spent horse. It was an even thing,
Whether she talked herself or me to death.
The latest sign of life was in her tongue;
It wagged till sundown, like a serpent's tail,
Long after all the rest of her was cold.
Alas! poor Zippa!

LANCIOTTO. Were you married, fool?

PEPE. Married! Have I the scars upon me? No;
I fell in love; and that was bad enough,
And far enough for a mere fool to go.
Married! why, marriage is love's purgatory,
Without a heaven beyond.



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LANCIOTTO. Fie, atheist!
Would you abolish marriage?

PEPE. Yes.

LANCIOTTO. What?

PEPE. Yes.

LANCIOTTO. Depopulate the world?

PEPE. No fear of that.
I'd have no families, no Malatesti,
Strutting about the land, with pedigrees
And claims bequeathed them by their ancestors;
No fellows vapouring of their royal blood;
No one to seize a whole inheritance,
And rob the other children of the earth.
By Jove! you should not know your fathers, even!
I'd have you spring, like toadstools, from the soil—
Mere sons of women—nothing more nor less—
All base-born, and all equal. There, my lord,
There is a simple commonwealth for you!
In which aspiring merit takes the lead,
And birth goes begging.

LANCIOTTO. It is so, in truth;
And by the simplest means I ever heard.

PEPE. Think of it, cousin. Tell it to your friends,
The statesmen, soldiers, and philosophers;
Noise it about the earth, and let it stir
The sluggish spirits of the multitudes.
Pursue the thought, scan it, from end to end,
Through all its latent possibilities.
It is a great seed dropped, I promise you,
And it must sprout. Thought never wholly dies;
It only wants a name—a hard Greek name—
Some few apostles, who may live on it—
crowd of listeners, with the average dulness
That man possesses—and we organize;
Spread our new doctrine, like a general plague;
Talk of man's progress and development,
Wrongs of society, the march of mind,



The Devil, Doctor Faustus, and what not;
And, lo! this pretty world turns upside down,
All with a fool's idea!

LANCIOTTO. By Jupiter,
You hit our modern teachers to a hair!
I knew this fool was a philosopher.
Pepe is right. Mechanic means advance;
Nature bows down to Science' haughty tread,
And turns the wheel of smutty artifice:
New governments arise, dilate, decay,
And foster creeds and churches to their tastes:
At each advance, we cry, "Behold, the end!"
Till some fresh wonder breaks upon the age.
But man, the moral creature, midst it all
Stands still unchanged; nor moves towards virtue more,
Nor comprehends the mysteries in himself,
More than when Plato taught academies,
Or Zeno thundered from his Attic porch.

PEPE. I know not that; I only want my scheme
Tried for a while. I am a politician,
A wrongs-of-man man. Hang philosophy!
Let metaphysics swallow, at a gulp,
Its last two syllables, and purge itself
Clean of its filthy humours! I am one
Ready for martyrdom, for stake and fire,
If I can make my great idea take root!
Zounds! cousin, if I had an audience,
I'd make you shudder at my eloquence!
I have an itching to reform the world.



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LANCIOTTO. Begin at home, then.

PEPE. Home is not my sphere;
Heaven picked me out to teach my fellow-men.
I am a very firebrand of truth—
A self-consuming, doomed, devoted brand—
That burns to ashes while I light the world!
I feel it in me. I am moved, inspired,
Stirred into utterance, by some mystic power
Of which I am the humble instrument.

LANCIOTTO. A bad digestion, sage, a bilious turn,
A gnawing stomach, or a pinching shoe.

PEPE. O! hear, but spare the scoffer! Spare the wretch
Who sneers at the anointed man of truth!
When we reached that, I and my followers
Would rend you limb from limb. There!—ha! ha! ha!
[*Laughing.*]
Have I not caught the slang these fellows preach;
A grand, original idea, to back it;
And all the stock in trade of a reformer?

LANCIOTTO. You have indeed; nor do I wonder, Pepe.
Fool as you are, I promise you success
In your new calling, if you'll set it up.
The thing is far too simple.

Trumpet sounds within.

PEPE. Hist! my lord.

LANCIOTTO. That calls me to myself.

PEPE. At that alarm,
All Rimini leaped up upon its feet.
Cousin, your bridal-train. You groan! 'Ods wounds!
Here is the bridegroom sorely malcontent—
The sole sad face in Rimini. Since morn,
A quiet man could hardly walk the streets,
For flowers and streamers. All the town is gay.
Perhaps 'tis merry o'er your misery.

LANCIOTTO. Perhaps; but that it knows not.



PEPE. Yes, it does:
It knows that when a man's about to wed,
He's ripe to laugh at. Cousin, tell me, now,
Why is Paolo on the way so long?
Ravenna's but eight leagues from Rimini—

LANCIOTTO. That's just the measure of your tongue, good fool.
You trouble me. I've had enough of you—
Begone!

PEPE. I'm going; but you see I limp.
Have pity on a cripple, gentle Count. [*Limps.*]

LANCIOTTO. Pepe!

PEPE. A miracle, a miracle!
See, see, my lord, at Pepe's saintly name
The lame jog on.

MALATESTA. [*Without.*] Come, Lanciotto!

LANCIOTTO. Hark!
My father calls.

PEPE. If he were mine, I'd go—
That's a good boy! [*Pats LANCIOTTO'S back.*]

LANCIOTTO. [*Starting.*] Hands off! you'll rue it else! [*Exit.*]



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PEPE. [Laughing.] Ha! ha! I laid my hand upon his hump!
Heavens, how he squirmed! And what a wish I had
To cry, Ho! camel! leap upon his back,
And ride him to the devil! So, we've had
A pleasant flitting round philosophy!
The Count and Fool bumped heads, and struck ideas
Out by the contact! Quite a pleasant talk—
A friendly conversation, nothing more—
'Twi'xt nobleman and jester. Ho! my bird,
I can toss lures as high as any man.
So, I amuse you with my harmless wit?
Pepe's your friend now—you can trust in him—
An honest, simple fool! Just try it once,
You ugly, misbegotten clod of dirt!
Ay, but the hump—the touch upon the hump—
The start and wriggle—that was rare! Ha! ha!

[Exit, laughing.]

SCENE II.

The Same. The Grand Square before the Castle. SOLDIERS on guard, with banners, etc. CITIZENS, in holiday dresses, cross the scene. The houses are hung with trophies, banners, garlands, etc. Enter MALATESTA, with GUARDS, ATTENDANTS, etc.

MALATESTA. Captain, take care the streets be not choked up
By the rude rabble. Send to Caesar's bridge
A strong detachment of your men, and clear
The way before them. See that nothing check
The bride's first entrance into Rimini.
Station your veterans in the front. Count Guido
Comes with his daughter, and his eyes are sharp.
Keep up a show of strength before him, sir;
And set some labourers to work upon
The broken bastion. Make all things look bright;
As if we stood in eager readiness,
And high condition, to begin a war.

CAPTAIN. I will, my lord.

MALATESTA. Keep Guido in your eye;
And if you see him looking over-long



On any weakness of our walls, just file
Your bulkiest fellows round him; or get up
A scuffle with the people; anything—
Even if you break a head or two—to draw
His vision off. But where our strength is great,
Take heed to make him see it. You conceive?

CAPTAIN. Trust me, my lord. *[Exit with GUARDS.]*

Enter PEPE.

PEPE. Room, room! A hall; a hall!
I pray you, good man, has the funeral passed?

MALATESTA. Who is it asks?

PEPE. Pepe of Padua,
A learned doctor of uncivil law.

MALATESTA. But how a funeral?

PEPE. You are weak of wit.
Francesca of Ravenna's borne to church,
And never issues thence.

MALATESTA. How, doctor, pray?

PEPE. Now, for a citizen of Rimini,
You're sadly dull. Does she not issue thence
Fanny of Rimini? A glorious change,—
kind of resurrection in the flesh!

MALATESTA. *[Laughing.]* Ha! ha! thou cunning villain! I was caught.
I own it, doctor.



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PEPE. [*Aside.*] This old fool would laugh
To see me break a straw, because the bits
Were of unequal lengths. My character
Carries more dulness, in the guise of wit,
Than would suffice to break an ass's back.

[*Distant shouts, music, &c.*]

Hark! here comes Jephtha's daughter, jogging on
With timbrels and with dances.

MALATESTA. Jephtha's daughter!
How so?

PEPE. Her father's sacrifice.

MALATESTA. [*Laughing.*] Ho! ho!
You'll burst my belt! O! you outrageous wretch,
To jest at Scripture!

PEPE. You outlandish heathen,
Tis not in Scripture!

MALATESTA. Is it not?

PEPE. No more
Than you are in heaven. Mere Hebrew history.
She went up to the mountains, to bewail
The too-long keeping of her honesty.
There's woman for you! there's a character!
What man would ever think of such a thing?
Ah! we of Rimini have little cause
For such a sorrow. Would she'd been my wife!
I'll marry any woman in her case.

MALATESTA. Why, Pepe?

PEPE. Why? because, in two months' time,
Along comes father Jephtha with his knife,
And there's an end. Where is your sacrifice?
Where's Isaac, Abraham? Build your altar up:
One pile will do for both.

MALATESTA. That's Scripture, sure.



PEPE. Then I'm a ram, and you may slaughter me
In Isaac's stead.

MALATESTA. Here comes the vanguard. Where,
Where is that laggard?

PEPE. At the mirror, uncle,
Making himself look beautiful. He comes,
[*Looking out.*]
Fresh as a bridegroom! Mark his doublet's fit
Across the shoulders, and his hose!—
By Jove, he nearly looks like any other man!

MALATESTA. You'd best not let him hear you. Sirrah, knave,
I have a mind to swinge you! [*Seizes his ear.*]

PEPE. Loose my ear!
You've got the wrong sow, swineherd! You're unjust.
Being his father, I was fool sufficient
To think you fashioned him to suit yourself,
By way of a variety. The thought
Was good enough, the practice damnable.

MALATESTA. Hush! or I'll clap you in the pillory.

Enter LANCIOTTO.

PEPE. [*Sings.*] Ho, ho, ho, ho!—old Time has wings—
We're born, we mourn, we wed, we bed,
We have a devilish aching head;
So down we lie,
And die, and fry;
And there's a merry end of things!

[*Music, &c., within.*]

Here come Ravenna's eagles for a roost
In Rimini! The air is black with them.
When go they hence? Wherever yon bird builds,
The nest remains for ages. Have an eye,
Or Malatesta's elephant may feel
The eagle's talons.



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LANCIOTTO. You're a raven, croaker.

PEPE. And you no white crow, to insure us luck.

MALATESTA. There's matter in his croak.

PEPE. There always is;
But men lack ears.

MALATESTA. Then eyes must do our work.
Old Guido shall be looked to. If his force
Appear too great, I'll camp him out of town.

LANCIOTTO. Father, you are a sorry host.

MALATESTA. Well, well,
I'm a good landlord, though. I do not like
This flight of eagles more than Pepe. 'Sdeath!
Guido was ever treacherous.

LANCIOTTO. My lord,
You mar my holiday by such a thought.
My holiday! Dear saints! it seems to me
That all of you are mocking me.

PEPE. So—so—
Guido was ever treacherous?—so—so!

MALATESTA. So—so! How so?

PEPE. What if this treachery
Run in the blood? We'll tap a vein then—so!

MALATESTA. Sew up your mouth, and mind your fooling fool!

PEPE. Am I not fooling? Why, my lord, I thought
The fooling exquisite.

LANCIOTTO. [*Aside.*] This thoughtless knave
Hits near us sometimes with his random shafts.
Marriage for me! I cannot comprehend,
I cannot take it to my heart; the thing
Seems gross, absurd, ridiculous. Ah! well,
My father bears the folly of it all;
I'm but an actor in his comedy.



My part is bad, but I must through with it.

[Retires.

Shouts, music, &c., within.

PEPE. Look! here's the whole parade! Mark yonder knave—
The head one with the standard. Nature, nature!
Hadst thou a hand in such a botch-work? Why,
A forest of his legs would scarcely make
A bunch of fagots. Mark old Guido, too!
He looks like Judas with his silver. Ho!
Here's news from sweet Ravenna!

MALATESTA. [*Laughing.*] Ha! ha! ha!

PEPE. Ah! now the bride!—that's something—she is tooth-some.
Look you, my lord—now, while the progress halts—
Cousin Paolo, has he got the dumps?
Mercy! to see him, one might almost think
'T was his own marriage. What a doleful face!
The boy is ill. He caught a fever, uncle,
Travelling across the marshes. Physic! physic!
If he be really dying, get a doctor,
And cut the matter short. 'Twere merciful.

MALATESTA. For heaven's sake, cease your clamour! I shall have
No face to meet them else. 'Tis strange, for all:
What ails Paolo?

PEPE. Dying, by this hand!

MALATESTA. Then I will hang you.

PEPE. Don't take up my craft.
Wit's such a stranger in your brain that I
Scarce knew my lodger venturing from your mouth.
Now they come on again.



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MALATESTA. Stand back!

PEPE. [*Looking round.*] The bridegroom?
He flies betimes, before the bride shows fight.
[*Walks back, looking for LANCIOTTO.*]

Music, shouts, ringing of bells, &c. Enter MEN-AT-ARMS, with banners, &c., GUIDO, CARDINAL, KNIGHTS, ATTENDANTS, &c.; then_ PAOLO, conducting FRANCESCA, followed by RITTA, LADIES, PAGES, &c., and other_ MEN-AT-ARMS. They file around the stage, and halt.

MALATESTA. Welcome, to Rimini, Count Guido! Welcome,
And fair impressions of our poor abode,
To you, my daughter! You are well returned,
My son, Paolo! Let me bless you, son.

[*PAOLO approaches.*]
How many spears are in old Guido's train?

[*Apart to PAOLO.*]

PAOLO. Some ten-score.

MALATESTA. Footmen?

PAOLO. Double that.

MALATESTA. 'Tis well.
Again I bid you welcome! Make no show
Of useless ceremony with us. Friends
Have closer titles than the empty name.
We have provided entertainment, Count,
For all your followers, in the midst of us.
We trust the veterans of Rimini
May prove your soldiers that our courtesy
Does not lag far behind their warlike zeal.
Let us drop Guelf and Ghibelin henceforth,
Coupling the names of Rimini and Ravenna
As bridegroom's to his bride's.

GUIDO. Count Malatesta,
I am no rhetorician, or my words
Might keep more even with the love I feel:
Simply, I thank you. With an honest hand
I take the hand which you extend to me,



And hope our grasp may never lose its warmth.—
You marked the bastion by the water-side?
Weak as a bulrush. [*Apart to a KNIGHT.*]

KNIGHT. Tottering weak, my lord.

GUIDO. Remember it; and when you're private, sir,
Draw me a plan.

KNIGHT. I will, my lord.

GUIDO. How's this?
I do not see my future son-in-law.

MALATESTA. Lanciotto!

LANCIOTTO. [*Advancing.*] I am here, my lord.

FRANCESCA. [*Starting.*] O! heaven!
Is that my husband, Count Paolo? You,
You then, among the rest, have played me false!
He is—[*Apart to PAOLO.*]

PAOLO My brother.

LANCIOTTO [*Aside.*] Ha! she turns from me.

PEPE. [*Approaching LANCIOTTO, sings.*]

Around, around the lady turned,
She turned not to her lord;
She turned around to a gallant, gallant knight,
Who ate at his father's board.

A pretty ballad! all on one string though.



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LANCIOTTO. Pepe, go hence! [PEPE *retires.*]
[*Aside.*] I saw her start and pale,
Turn off with horror; as if she had seen—
What?—simply me. For, am I not enough,
And something over, to make ladies quail,
Start, hide their faces, whisper to their friends,
Point at me—dare she?—and perform such tricks
As women will when monsters blast their sight?
O! saints above me, have I come so low?
Yon damsel of Ravenna shall bewail
That start and shudder. I am mad, mad, mad!
I must be patient. They have trifled with her:
Lied to her, lied! There's half the misery
Of this broad earth, all crowded in one word.
Lied, lied!—Who has not suffered from a lie?
They're all aghast—all looking at me too.
Francesca's whiter than the brow of fear:
Paolo talks.—Brother, is that well meant?
What if I draw my sword, and fight my way
Out of this cursed town? 'Twould be relief.
Has shame no hiding-place? I've touched the depth
Of human infamy, and there I rest.
By heaven, I'll brave this business out! Shall they
Say at Ravenna that Count Lanciotto,
Who's driven their shivering squadrons to their homes,
Haggard with terror, turned before their eyes
And slunk away? They'll look me from the field,
When we encounter next. Why should not I
Strut with my shapeless body, as old Guido
Struts with his shapeless heart? I'll do it! [*Offers, but shrinks back.*] 'Sdeath!
Am I so false as to forswear myself?
Lady Francesca! [*Approaches* FRANCESCA.

FRANCESCA. Sir—my lord—

LANCIOTTO. Dear lady,
I have a share in your embarrassment,
And know the feelings that possess you now.

FRANCESCA. O! you do not.

PAOLO. [*Advancing.*] My lady—



LANCIOTTO. Gentle brother,
Leave this to me. [PAOLO *retires*.

FRANCESCA. Pray do not send him off.

LANCIOTTO. 'Tis fitter so.

FRANCESCA. He comforts me.

LANCIOTTO. Indeed?
Do you need comfort?

FRANCESCA. No, no—pardon me!
But then—he is—you are—

LANCIOTTO. Take breath, and speak.

FRANCESCA. I am confused, 'tis true. But, then, my lord,
You are a stranger to me; and Paolo
I've known so long!

LANCIOTTO. Since yesterday.

FRANCESCA. Ah! well:
But the relationship between us two
Is of so close a nature, while the knowledge,
That each may have of each, so slender is
That the two jar. Besides, Paolo is
Nothing to me, while you are everything.
Can I not act? [*Aside*.

LANCIOTTO. I scarcely understand.
You say your knowledge of me, till to-day,
Was incomplete. Has naught been said of me
By Count Paolo or your father?



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FRANCESCA. Yes;
But nothing definite.

LANCIOTTO. Perchance, no hint
As to my ways, my feelings, manners, or—
Or—or—as I was saying—ha! ha!—or—
[*Laughing.*]
As to my person?

FRANCESCA. Nothing, as to that.

LANCIOTTO. To what?

FRANCESCA. Your—person.

LANCIOTTO. That's the least of all. [*Turns aside.*]
Now, had I Guido of Ravenna's head
Under this heel, I'd grind it into dust!
False villain, to betray his simple child!
And thou, Paolo—not a whit behind—
Helping his craft with inconsiderate love!—
Lady Francesca, when my brother left,
I charged him, as he loved me, to conceal
Nothing from you that bore on me: and now
That you have seen me, and conversed with me,
If you object to anything in me,—
Go, I release you.

FRANCESCA. But Ravenna's peace?

LANCIOTTO. Shall not be perilled.

GUIDO. [*Coming behind, whispers her.*] Trust him not, my child;
I know his ways; he'd rather fight than wed.
Tis but a wish to have the war afoot.
Stand firm for poor Ravenna!

LANCIOTTO. Well, my lady,
Shall we conclude a lasting peace between us
By truce or marriage rites?

GUIDO. [*Whispers her.*] The devil tempts thee:
Think of Ravenna, think of me!



LANCIOTTO. My lord,
I see my father waits you.
[GUIDO *retires*.

FRANCESCA. Gentle sir,
You do me little honour in the choice.

LANCIOTTO. My aim is justice.

FRANCESCA. Would you cast me off?

LANCIOTTO. Not for the world, if honestly obtained;
Not for the world would I obtain you falsely.

FRANCESCA. The rites were half concluded ere we met.

LANCIOTTO. Meeting, would you withdraw?

FRANCESCA. No. Bitter word! [*Aside*.

LANCIOTTO. No! Are you dealing fairly?

FRANCESCA. I have said.

LANCIOTTO. O! rapture, rapture! Can it be that I—
Now I'll speak plainly; for a choice like thine
Implies such love as woman never felt.
Love me! Then monsters beget miracles,
And Heaven provides where human means fall short.
Lady, I'll worship thee! I'll line thy path
With suppliant kings! Thy waiting-maids shall be
Unransomed princesses! Mankind shall bow
One neck to thee, as Persia's multitudes
Before the rising sun! From this small town,
This centre of my conquests, I will spread
An empire touching the extremes of earth!
I'll raise once more the name of ancient Rome;
And what she swayed she shall reclaim again!
If I grow mad because you smile on me,
Think of the glory of thy love; and know
How hard it is, for such a one as I,
To gaze unshaken on divinity!
There's no such love as mine alive in man.
From every corner of the frowning earth,
It has been crowded back into my heart.
Now, take it all! If that be not enough,
Ask, and thy wish shall be omnipotent!
Your hand. [*Takes her hand.*] It wavers.



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FRANCESCA. So does not my heart.

LANCIOTTO. Bravo! Thou art every way a soldier's wife;
Thou shouldst have been a Caesar's! Father, hark!
I blamed your judgment, only to perceive
The weakness of my own.

MALATESTA. What means all this?

LANCIOTTO. It means that this fair lady—though I gave
Release to her, and to Ravenna—placed
The liberal hand, which I restored to her,
Back in my own, of her own free good-will.
Is it not wonderful?

MALATESTA. How so?

LANCIOTTO. How so!

PAOLO. Alas! 'tis as I feared! [*Aside.*

MALATESTA. You're humble?—How?

LANCIOTTO. Now shall I cry aloud to all the world,
Make my deformity my pride, and say,
Because she loves me, I may boast of it? [*Aside.*]
No matter, father, I am happy; you,
As the blessed cause, shall share my happiness.
Let us be moving. Revels, dashed with wine,
Shall multiply the joys of this sweet day!
There's not a blessing in the cup of life
I have not tasted of within an hour!

FRANCESCA. [*Aside.*] Thus I begin the practice of deceit,
Taught by deceivers, at a fearful cost.
The bankrupt gambler has become the cheat,
And lives by arts that erewhile ruined me.
Where it will end, Heaven knows; but I—
I have betrayed the noblest heart of all!

LANCIOTTO. Draw down thy dusky vapours, sullen night—
Refuse, ye stars, to shine upon the world—
Let everlasting blackness wrap the sun,
And whisper terror to the universe!
We need ye not! we'll blind ye, if ye dare



Peer with lack-lustre on our revelry!
I have at heart a passion, that would make
All nature blaze with recreated light! [*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV

SCENE I. *The Same. An Apartment in the Castle. Enter LANCIOTTO.*

LANCIOTTO. It cannot be that I have duped myself,
That my desire has played into the hand
Of my belief; yet such a thing might be.
We palm more frauds upon our simple selves
Than knavery puts upon us. Could I trust
The open candour of an angel's brow,
I must believe Francesca's. But the tongue
Should consummate the proof upon the brow,
And give the truth its word. The fault lies there.
I've tried her. Press her as I may to it,
She will not utter those three little words—
"I love thee." She will say, "I'll marry you;—
I'll be your duteous wife;—I'll cheer your days;—
I'll do whate'er I can." But at the point
Of present love, she ever shifts the ground,
Winds round the word, laughs, calls me "Infidel!—
How can I doubt?" So, on and on. But yet,
For all her dainty ways, she never says,



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Frankly, I love thee. I am jealous—true!
Suspicious—true! distrustful of myself;—
She knows all that. Ay, and she likewise knows,
A single waking of her morning breath
Would blow these vapours off. I would not take
The barren offer of a heartless hand,
If all the Indies covered under it.
Perhaps she loves another? No; she said,
“I love you, Count, as well as any man;”
And laughed, as if she thought that precious wit.
I turn her nonsense into argument,
And think I reason. Shall I give her up?
Rail at her heartlessness, and bid her go
Back to Ravenna? But she clings to me,
At the least hint of parting. Ah! 'tis sweet,
Sweeter than slumber to the lids of pain,
To fancy that a shadow of true love
May fall on this God-stricken mould of woe,
From so serene a nature. Beautiful
Is the first vision of a desert brook,
Shining beneath its palmy garniture,
To one who travels on his easy way;
What is it to the blood-shot, aching eye
Of some poor wight who crawls with gory feet,
In famished madness, to its very brink;
And throws his sun-scorched limbs upon the cool
And humid margin of its shady strand,
To suck up life at every eager gasp?
Such seems Francesca to my thirsting soul;
Shall I turn off and die?

Enter PEPE.

PEPE. Good-morning, cousin!

LANCIOTTO. Good-morning to your foolish majesty!

PEPE. The same to your majestic foolery!

LANCIOTTO. You compliment!



PEPE. I am a troubadour,
A ballad-monger of fine mongrel ballads,
And therefore running o'er with elegance.
Wilt hear my verse?

LANCIOTTO. With patience?

PEPE. No, with rapture.
You must go mad—weep, rend your clothes, and roll
Over and over, like the ancient Greeks,
When listening to Iliad.

LANCIOTTO. Sing, then, sing!
And if you equal Homer in your song,
Why, roll I must, by sheer compulsion.

PEPE. Nay,
You lack the temper of the fine-eared Greek.
You will not roll; but that shall not disgrace
My gallant ballad, fallen on evil times. [*Sings.*]

My father had a blue-black head,
My uncle's head was reddish—maybe,
My mother's hair was noways red,
Sing high ho! the pretty baby!

Mark the simplicity of that! 'Tis called
"The Babe's Confession," spoken just before
His father strangled him.

LANCIOTTO. Most marvellous!
You struggle with a legend worth your art.

PEPE. Now to the second stanza. Note the hint
I drop about the baby's parentage:
So delicately too! A maid might sing,
And never blush at it. Girls love these songs
Of sugared wickedness. They'll go miles about,
To say a foul thing in a cleanly way.
A decent immorality, my lord,
Is art's specific. Get the passions up,
But never wring the stomach.



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LANCIOTTO. Triumphant art!

PEPE. [*Sings.*]

My father combed his blue-black head,
My uncle combed his red head—maybe,
My mother combed my head, and said,
Sing high ho! my red-haired baby.

LANCIOTTO. Fie, fie! go comb your hair in private.

PEPE.

What!

Will you not hear? Now comes the tragedy.

[*Sings.*]

My father tore my red, red head,
My uncle tore my father's—maybe,
My mother tore both till they bled—
Sing high ho! your brother's baby!

LANCIOTTO. Why, what a hair-rending!

PEPE. Thence wigs arose;
A striking epoch in man's history.
But did you notice the concluding line,
Sung by the victim's mother? There's a hit!

“Sing high ho! your brother's baby!”

Which brother's, pray you? That's the mystery,
The adumbration of poetic art,
And there I leave it to perplex mankind.
It has a moral, fathers should regard,—
A black-haired dog breeds not a red-haired cur.
Treasure this knowledge: you're about to wive;
And no one knows what accident—

LANCIOTTO. Peace, fool!

So all this cunning thing was wound about,
To cast a jibe at my deformity? [*Tears off PEPE'S cap.*]
There lies your cap, the emblem that protects
Your head from chastisement. Now, Pepe, hark!
Of late you've taken to reviling me;
Under your motley, you have dared to jest



At God's inflictions. Let me tell you, fool,
No man e'er lived, to make a second jest
At me, before your time!

PEPE. Boo! bloody-bones!
If you're a coward—which I hardly think—
You'll have me flogged, or put into a cell,
Or fed to wolves. If you are bold of heart,
You'll let me run. Do not; I'll work you harm!
I, Beppo Pepe, standing as a man,
Without my motley, tell you, in plain terms,
I'll work you harm—I'll do you mischief, man!

LANCIOTTO. I, Lanciotto, Count of Rimini,
Will hang you, then. Put on your jingling cap;
You please my father. But remember, fool,
No jests at me!

PEPE. I will try earnest next.

LANCIOTTO. And I the gallows.

PEPE. Well, cry quits, cry quits!
I'll stretch your heart, and you my neck—quits, quits!

LANCIOTTO. Go, fool! Your weakness bounds your malice.

PEPE. Yes:
So you all think, you savage gentlemen,
Until you feel my sting. Hang, hang away!
It is an airy, wholesome sort of death,
Much to my liking. When I hang, my friend,
You'll be chief mourner, I can promise you.
Hang me! I've quite a notion to be hung:
I'll do my utmost to deserve it. Hang! [*Exit.*]



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LANCIOTTO. I am bemocked on all sides. My sad state
Has given the licensed and unlicensed fool
Charter to challenge me at every turn.
The jester's laughing bauble blunts my sword,
His gibes cut deeper than its fearful edge;
And I, a man, a soldier, and a prince,
Before this motley patchwork of a man,
Stand all appalled, as if he were a glass
Wherein I saw my own deformity.
O Heaven! a tear—one little tear—to wash
This aching dryness of the heart away!

Enter PAOLO.

PAOLO. What ails the fool? He passed me, muttering
The strangest garbage in the fiercest tone.
"Ha! ha!" cried he, "they made a fool of me—
motley man, a slave; as if I felt
No stir in me of manly dignity!
Ha! ha! a fool—a painted plaything, toy—
For men to kick about this dirty world!—
My world as well as theirs.—God's world, I trow!
I will get even with them yet—ha! ha!
In the democracy of death we'll square.
I'll crawl and lie beside a king's own son;
Kiss a young princess, dead lip to dead lip;
Pull the Pope's nose; and kick down Charlemagne,
Throne, crown, and all, where the old idiot sprawls,
Safe as he thinks, rotting in royal state!"
And then he laughed and gibbered, as if drunk
With some infernal ecstasy.

LANCIOTTO. Poor fool!
That is the groundwork of his malice, then,—
His conscious difference from the rest of men?
I, of all men, should pity him the most.
Poor Pepe! I'll be kinder. I have wronged
A feeling heart. Poor Pepe!

PAOLO. Sad again!
Where has the rapture gone of yesterday?

LANCIOTTO. Where are the leaves of Summer? Where the snows
Of last year's Winter? Where the joys and griefs



That shut our eyes to yesternight's repose,
And woke not on the morrow? Joys and griefs,
Huntsmen and hounds, ye follow us as game,
Poor panting outcasts of your forest-law!
Each cheers the others,—one with wild halloos,
And one with whines and howls.—A dreadful chase,
That only closes when horns sound a *mort!*

PAOLO. Thus ever up and down! Arouse yourself,
Balance your mind more evenly, and hunt
For honey in the wormwood.

LANCIOTTO. Or find gall
Hid in the hanging chalice of the rose:
Which think you better? If my mood offend,
We'll turn to business,—to the empty cares
That make such pother in our feverish life.
When at Ravenna, did you ever hear
Of any romance in Francesca's life?
A love-tilt, gallantry, or anything
That might have touched her heart?

PAOLO. Not lightly even.
I think her heart as virgin as her hand.

LANCIOTTO. Then there is hope.

PAOLO. Of what?

LANCIOTTO. Of winning her.



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PAOLO. Grammercy! Lanciotto, are you sane?
You boasted yesterday—

LANCIOTTO. And changed to-day.
Is that so strange? I always mend the fault
Of yesterday with wisdom of to-day.
She does not love me.

PAOLO. Pshaw! she marries you:
'Twere proof enough for me.

LANCIOTTO. Perhaps, she loves you.

PAOLO. Me, Lanciotto, me! For mercy's sake,
Blot out such thoughts—they madden me! What, love—
She love—yet marry you!

LANCIOTTO. It moves you much.
'Twas but a fleeting fancy, nothing more.

PAOLO. You have such wild conjectures!

LANCIOTTO. Well, to me
They seem quite tame; they are my bed-fellows.
Think, to a modest woman, what must be
The loathsome kisses of an unloved man—
A gross, coarse ruffian!

PAOLO. O! good heavens, forbear!

LANCIOTTO. What shocks you so?

PAOLO. The picture which you draw,
Wronging yourself by horrid images.

LANCIOTTO. Until she love me, till I know, beyond
The cavil of a doubt, that she is mine—
Wholly, past question—do you think that I
Could so afflict the woman whom I love?

PAOLO. You love her, Lanciotto!

LANCIOTTO. Next to you,
Dearer than anything in nature's scope.



PAOLO. [*Aside.*] O! Heaven, that I must bear this! Yes, and more,—
More torture than I dare to think upon,
Spreads out before me with the coming years,
And holds a record blotted with my tears,
As that which I must suffer!

LANCIOTTO. Come, Paolo,
Come help me woo. I need your guiding eye,
To signal me, if I should sail astray.

PAOLO. O! torture, torture! [*Aside.*

LANCIOTTO. You and I, perchance,
Joining our forces, may prevail at last.
They call love like a battle. As for me,
I'm not a soldier equal to such wars,
Despite my arduous schooling. Tutor me
In the best arts of amorous strategy.
I am quite raw, Paolo. Glances, sighs,
Sweets of the lip, and arrows of the eye,
Shrugs, cringes, compliments, are new to me;
And I shall handle them with little art.
Will you instruct me?

PAOLO. Conquer for yourself.
Two captains share one honour: keep it all.
What if I ask to share the spoils?

LANCIOTTO. [*Laughing.*] Ha! ha!
I'll trust you, brother. Let us go to her:
Francesca is neglected while we jest.
I know not how it is, but your fair face,
And noble figure, always cheer me up,
More than your words; there's healing in them, too,
For my worst griefs. Dear brother, let us in. [*Exeunt.*



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SCENE II.

The Same. A Chamber in the Same. FRANCESCA and RITTA discovered at the bridal toilet.

RITTA. [*Sings.*]

Ring high, ring high! to earth and sky;
A lady goes a-wedding;
The people shout, the show draws out,
And smiles the bride is shedding.

No bell for you, ye ragged few;
A beggar goes a-wedding;
The people sneer, the thing's so queer,
And tears the bride is shedding.

Ring low, ring low! dull bell of woe,
One tone will do for either;
The lady glad, and beggar sad,
Have both lain down together.

FRANCESCA. A mournful ballad!

RITTA. I scarce knew I sang.
I'm weary of this wreath. These orange-flowers
Will never be adjusted to my taste:
Strive as I will, they ever look awry.
My fingers ache!

FRANCESCA. Not more than my poor head.
There, leave them so.

RITTA. That's better, yet not well.

FRANCESCA. They are but fading things, not worth your pains:
They'll scarce outlive the marriage merriment.
Ritta, these flowers are hypocrites; they show
An outside gayety, yet die within,
Minute by minute. You shall see them fall,
Black with decay, before the rites are o'er.

RITTA. How beautiful you are!



FRANCESCA. Fie, flatterer!
White silk and laces, pearls and orange-flowers,
Would do as much for any one.

RITTA. No, no!
You give them grace, they nothing give to you.
Why, after all, you make the wreath look well;
But somewhat dingy, where it lies against
Your pulsing temple, sullen with disgrace.
Ah! well, your Count should be the proudest man
That ever led a lady into church,
Were he a modern Alexander. Poh!
What are his trophies to a face like that?

FRANCESCA. I seem to please you, Ritta.

RITTA. Please yourself,
And you will please me better. You are sad:
I marked it ever since you saw the Count.
I fear the splendour of his victories,
And his sweet grace of manner—for, in faith,
His is the gentlest, grandest character,
Despite his—

FRANCESCA. Well?

RITTA. Despite his—

FRANCESCA. Ritta, what?

RITTA. Despite his difference from Count Paolo.—
[FRANCESCA *staggers.*]
What is the matter? [*Supporting her.*]

FRANCESCA. Nothing; mere fatigue.
Hand me my kerchief. I am better now.
What were you saying?

RITTA. That I fear the Count
Has won your love.

FRANCESCA. Would that be cause for fear?
[*Laughing.*]



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RITTA. O! yes, indeed! Once—long ago—I was
Just fool enough to tangle up my heart
With one of these same men. 'Twas terrible!
Morning or evening, waking or asleep,
I had no peace. Sighs, groans, and standing tears,
Counted my moments through the blessed day.
And then to this there was a dull, strange ache
Forever sleeping in my breast,—a numbing pain,
That would not for an instant be forgot.
O! but I loved him so, that very feeling
Became intolerable. And I believed
This false Giuseppe, too, for all the sneers,
The shrugs and glances, of my intimates.
They slandered me and him, yet I believed.
He was a noble, and his love to me
Was a reproach, a shame, yet I believed.
He wearied of me, tried to shake me off,
Grew cold and formal, yet I would not doubt.
O! lady, I was true! Nor till I saw
Giuseppe walk through the cathedral door
With Dora, the rich usurer's niece, upon
The very arm to which I clung so oft,
Did I so much as doubt him. Even then—
More is my shame—I made excuses for him.
“Just this or that had forced him to the course:
Perhaps, he loved me yet—a little yet.
His fortune, or his family, had driven
My poor Giuseppe thus against his heart.
The low are sorry judges for the great.
Yes, yes, Giuseppe loved me!” But at last
I did awake. It might have been with less:
There was no need of crushing me, to break
My silly dream up. In the street, it chanced,
Dora and he went by me, and he laughed—
A bold, bad laugh—right in my poor pale face,
And turned and whispered Dora, and she laughed.
Ah! then I saw it all. I've been awake,
Ever since then, I warrant you. And now
I only pray for him sometimes, when friends
Tell his base actions towards his hapless wife.—
O! I am lying—I pray every night! [*Weeps.*]

FRANCESCA. Poor Ritta. [*Weeping.*]



RITTA. No! blest Ritta! Thank kind heaven,
That kept me spotless when he tempted me,
And my weak heart was pleading with his tongue.
Pray, do not weep. You spoil your eyes for me.
But never love; O! it is terrible!

FRANCESCA. I'll strive against it.

RITTA. Do: because, my lady,
Even a husband may be false, you know;
Ay, even to so sweet a wife as you.
Men have odd tastes. They'll surfeit on the charms
Of Cleopatra, and then turn aside
To woo her blackamoor. 'Tis so, in faith;
Or Dora's uncle's gold had ne'er outbid
The boundless measure of a love like mine.
Think of it, lady, to weigh love with gold!
What could be meaner?



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FRANCESCA. Nothing, nothing, Ritta.
Though gold's the standard measure of the world,
And seems to lighten everything beside.
Yet heave the other passions in the scale,
And balance them 'gainst that which gold outweighs—
Against this love—and you shall see how light
The most supreme of them are in the poise!
I speak by book and history; for love
Slights my high fortunes. Under cloth of state
The urchin cowers from pompous etiquette,
Waiving his function at the scowl of power,
And seeks the rustic cot to stretch his limbs
In homely freedom. I fulfil a doom.
We who are topmost on this heap of life
Are nearer to heaven's hand than you below;
And so are used, as ready instruments,
To work its purposes. Let envy hide
Her witless forehead at a prince's name,
And fix her hopes upon a clown's content.
You, happy lowly, know not what it is
To groan beneath the crowned yoke of state,
And bear the goadings of the sceptre. Ah!
Fate drives us onward in a narrow way,
Despite our boasted freedom.

[Enter PAOLO, with PAGES bearing torches.]

Gracious saints!
What brought you here?

PAOLO. The bridegroom waits.

FRANCESCA. He does?
Let him wait on forever! I'll not go!
O! dear Paolo—

PAOLO. Sister!

FRANCESCA. It is well.
I have been troubled with a sleepless night.
My brain is wild. I know not what I say.
Pray, do not call me sister: it is cold.
I never had a brother, and the name



Sounds harshly to me. When you speak to me,
Call me Francesca.

PAOLO. You shall be obeyed.

FRANCESCA. I would not be obeyed. I'd have you do it
Because—because you love me—as a sister—
And of your own good-will, not my command,
Would please me.—Do you understand?

PAOLO. Too well! [*Aside.*]
'Tis a nice difference.

FRANCESCA. Yet you understand?
Say that you do.

PAOLO. I do.

FRANCESCA. That pleases me.
'Tis flattering if our—friends appreciate
Our nicer feelings.

PAOLO. I await you, lady.

FRANCESCA. Ritta, my gloves.—Ah! yes, I have them on;
Though I'm not quite prepared. Arrange my veil;
It folds too closely. That will do; retire. [*RITTA retires.*]
So, Count Paolo, you have come, hot haste,
To lead me to the church,—to have your share
In my undoing? And you came, in sooth,
Because they sent you? You are very tame!
And if they sent, was it for you to come?

PAOLO. Lady, I do not understand this scorn.
I came, as is my duty, to escort
My brother's bride to him. When next you're called,
I'll send a lackey.



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FRANCESCA. I have angered you.

PAOLO. With reason: I would not appear to you
Low or contemptible.

FRANCESCA. Why not to me?

PAOLO. Lady, I'll not be catechized.

FRANCESCA. Ha! Count!

PAOLO. No! if you press me further, I will say
A word to madden you.—Stand still! You stray
Around the margin of a precipice.
I know what pleasure 'tis to pluck the flowers
That hang above destruction, and to gaze
Into the dread abyss, to see such things
As may be safely seen. 'Tis perilous:
The eye grows dizzy as we gaze below,
And a wild wish possesses us to spring
Into the vacant air. Beware, beware!
Lest this unholy fascination grow
Too strong to conquer!

FRANCESCA. You talk wildly, Count;
There's not a gleam of sense in what you say;
I cannot hit your meaning.

PAOLO. Lady, come!

FRANCESCA. Count, you are cruel! [*Weeps*].

PAOLO. O! no; I would be kind.
But now, while reason over-rides my heart,
And seeming anger plays its braggart part—
In heaven's name, come!

FRANCESCA. One word—one question more:
Is it your wish this marriage should proceed?

PAOLO. It is.

FRANCESCA. Come on! You shall not take my hand:
I'll walk alone—now, and forever!



PAOLO. [*Taking her hand.*] Sister!

[*Exeunt PAOLO and FRANCESCA, with PAGES.*]

RITTA. O! misery, misery!—it is plain as day—
She loves Paolo! Why will those I love
Forever get themselves ensnared, and heaven
Forever call on me to succor them?
Here was the mystery, then—the sighs and tears,
The troubled slumbers, and the waking dreams!
And now she's walking through the chapel-door,
Her bridal robe above an aching heart,
Dressed up for sacrifice. Tis terrible!
And yet she'll smile and do it. Smile, for years,
Until her heart breaks; and the nurses ask
The doctor of the cause. He'll answer, too,
In hard thick Latin, and believe himself.
O! my dear mistress! Heaven, pray torture me!
Send back Giuseppe, let him ruin me,
And scorn me after; but, sweet heaven, spare her!
I'll follow her. O! what a world is this! [*Exit.*]

SCENE III.

The Same. Interior of the Cathedral. LANCIOTTO, FRANCESCA, PAOLO, MALATESTA, GUIDO, RITTA, PEPE, LORDS, KNIGHTS, PRIESTS, PAGES, a bridal-train of LADIES, SOLDIERS, CITIZENS, ATTENDANTS, etc., discovered before the High Altar. Organ music. The rites being over, they advance.

MALATESTA. By heaven—

PEPE. O! uncle, uncle, you're in church!



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MALATESTA. I'll break your head, knave!

PEPE. I claim sanctuary.

MALATESTA. Why, bridegroom, will you never kiss the bride?
We all are mad to follow you.

PEPE. Yes, yes;
Here was Paolo wetting his red lips
For the last minute. Kiss, and give him room.

MALATESTA. You heaven-forsaken imp, be quiet now!

PEPE. Then there'd be naught worth hearing.

MALATESTA. Bridegroom, come!

PEPE. Lord! he don't like it! Hey!—I told you so—
He backs at the first step. Does he not know
His trouble's just begun?

LANCIOTTO. Gentle Francesca,
Custom imposes somewhat on thy lips:
I'll make my levy. [*Kisses her. The others follow.*]
 [*Aside.*] Ha! she shrank! I felt
Her body tremble, and her quivering lips
Seemed dying under mine! I heard a sigh,
Such as breaks hearts—O! no, a very groan;
And then she turned a sickly, miserable look
On pale Paolo, and he shivered too!
There is a mystery hangs around her,—ay,
Paolo knows it, too.—By all the saints,
I'll make him tell it, at the dagger's point!
Paolo!—here! I do adjure you, brother,
By the great love I bear you, to reveal
The secret of Francesca's grief.

PAOLO. I cannot.

LANCIOTTO. She told you nothing?

PAOLO. Nothing.

LANCIOTTO. Not a word?



PAOLO. Not one.

LANCIOTTO. What heard you at Ravenna, then?

PAOLO. Nothing.

LANCIOTTO. Here?

PAOLO. Nothing.

LANCIOTTO. Not the slightest hint?—
Don't stammer, man! Speak quick! I am in haste.

PAOLO. Never.

LANCIOTTO. What know you?

PAOLO. Nothing that concerns
Your happiness, Lanciotto. If I did,
Would I not tell unquestioned?

LANCIOTTO. Would you not?
You ask a question for me: answer it.

PAOLO. I have.

LANCIOTTO. You juggle, you turn deadly pale,
Fumble your dagger, stand with head half round,
Tapping your feet.—You dare not look at me!
By Satan! Count Paolo, let me say,
You look much like a full-convicted thief!

PAOLO. Brother!—

LANCIOTTO. Pshaw! brother! You deceive me, sir:
You and that lady have a devil's league,
To keep a devil's secret. Is it thus
You deal with me? Now, by the light above
I'd give a dukedom for some fair pretext
To fly you all! She does not love me? Well,
I could bear that, and live away from her.
Love would be sweet, but want of it becomes



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An early habit to such men as I.
But you—ah! there's the sorrow—whom I loved
An infant in your cradle; you who grew
Up in my heart, with every inch you gained;
You whom I loved for every quality,
Good, bad, and common, in your natural stock;
Ay, for your very beauty! It is strange, you'll say,
For such a crippled horror to do that,
Against the custom of his kind! O! yes,
I love, and you betray me!

PAOLO. Lanciotto,
This is sheer frenzy. Join your bride.

LANCIOTTO. I'll not!
What, go to her, to feel her very flesh
Crawl from my touch?—to hear her sigh and moan,
As if God plagued her? Must I come to that?
Must I endure your hellish mystery
With my own wife, and roll my eyes away
In sentimental bliss? No, no! until
I go to her, with confident belief
In her integrity and candid love,
I'll shun her as a leper. [*Alarm-bells toll.*]

MALATESTA. What is that?

Enter, hastily, a MESSENGER in disorder.

MESSENGER. My lord, the Ghibelins are up—

LANCIOTTO. And I
Will put them down again! I thank thee, Heaven,
For this unlooked-for aid! [*Aside.*]

MALATESTA. What force have they?

LANCIOTTO. It matters not,—nor yet the time, place, cause,
Of their rebellion. I would throttle it,
Were it a riot, or a drunken brawl!



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[PAOLO *stands before him.*]

Out of my way, thou juggler! [*Exit.*]

PAOLO. He is gone!

ACT V.

SCENE I. *The Same. The Garden of the Castle. Enter PEPE, singing.*

PEPE. 'Tis jolly to walk in the shady greenwood
With a damsel by your side;
'Tis jolly to walk from the chapel-door,
With the hand of your pretty bride;
'Tis jolly to rest your weary head,
When life runs low and hope is fled,
On the heart where you confide:
'Tis jolly, jolly, jolly, they say,
They say—but I never tried.

Nor shall I ever till they dress their girls
In motley suits, and pair us, to increase
The race of fools. 'Twould be a noble thing,
A motley woman, had she wit enough
To bear the bell. But there's the misery:
You may make princes out of any stuff;
Fools come by nature. She'll make fifty kings—
Good, hearty tyrants, sound, cruel governors—
For one fine fool. There is Paolo, now,
A sweet-faced fellow with a wicked heart—
Talk of a flea, and you begin to scratch.
Lo! here he comes. And there's fierce crook-back's bride
Walking beside him—O, how gingerly!
Take care, my love! that is the very pace
We trip to hell with. Hunchback is away—
That was a fair escape for you; but, then,
The devil's ever with us, and that's worse.
See, the Ravenna giglet, Mistress Ritta,
And melancholy as a cow.—How's this?
I'll step aside, and watch you, pretty folks.

[Hides behind the bushes.]



Enter PAOLO and FRANCESCA, followed by RITTA. He seats himself in an arbour, and reads. RITTA and FRANCESCA advance.

FRANCESCA. Ritta.

RITTA. My lady.

FRANCESCA. You look tired.

RITTA. I'm not.

FRANCESCA. Go to your chamber.

RITTA. I would rather stay.
If it may please you. I require a walk
And the fresh atmosphere of breathing flowers,
To stir my blood. I am not very well.

FRANCESCA. I knew it, child. Go to your chamber, dear.
Paolo has a book to read to me.

RITTA. What, the romance? I should so love to hear!
I dote on poetry; and Count Paolo
Sweetens the Tuscan with his mellow voice.
I'm weary now, quite weary, and would rest.

FRANCESCA. Just now you wished to walk.

RITTA. Ah! did I so?
Walking or resting, I would stay with you.

FRANCESCA. The Count objects. He told me, yesterday,
That you were restless while he read to me;
And stirred your feet amid the grass, and sighed,
And yawned, until he almost paused.



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RITTA. Indeed
I will be quiet.

FRANCESCA. But he will not read.

RITTA. Let me go ask him. [*Runs toward* PAOLO.

FRANCESCA. Stop! Come hither, Ritta.
[*She returns.*]
I saw your new embroidery in the hall,—
The needle in the midst of Argus' eyes;
It should be finished.

RITTA. I will bring it here.—
O no! my finger's sore; I cannot work.

FRANCESCA. Go to your room.

RITTA. Let me remain, I pray.
'Tis better, lady; you may wish for me:
I know you will be sorry if I go.

FRANCESCA. I shall not, girl. Do as I order you.
Will you be headstrong?

RITTA. Do you wish it, then?

FRANCESCA. Yes, Ritta.

RITTA. Yet you made pretexts enough,
Before you ordered.

FRANCESCA. You are insolent.
Will you remain against my will?

RITTA. Yes, lady;
Rather than not remain.

FRANCESCA. Ha! impudent!

RITTA. You wrong me, gentle mistress. Love like mine
Does not ask questions of propriety,
Nor stand on manners. I would do you good,
Even while you smote me; I would push you back,



With my last effort, from the crumbling edge
Of some high rock o'er which you toppled me.

FRANCESCA. What do you mean?

RITTA. I know.

FRANCESCA. Know what?

RITTA. Too much.
Pray, do not ask me.

FRANCESCA. Speak!

RITTA. I know—dear lady,
Be not offended—

FRANCESCA. Tell me, simpleton!

RITTA. You know I worship you; you know I'd walk
Straight into ruin for a whim of yours;
You know—

FRANCESCA. I know you act the fool. Talk sense!

RITTA. I know Paolo loves you.

FRANCESCA. Should he not?
He is my brother.

RITTA. More than brother should.

FRANCESCA. Ha! are you certain?

RITTA. Yes, of more than that.

FRANCESCA. Of more?

RITTA. Yes, lady; for you love him, too.
I've said it! Fling me to the carrion crows,
Kill me by inches, boil me in the pot
Count Guido promised me,—but, O, beware!
Back, while you may. Make me the sufferer,
But save yourself!

FRANCESCA. Now, are you not ashamed,
To look me in the face with that bold brow?
I am amazed!



RITTA. I am a woman, lady;
I too have been in love; I know its ways,
Its arts, and its deceits. Your frowning face,
And seeming indignation, do not cheat.
Your heart is in my hand.



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PAOLO. [*Calls.*] Francesca!

FRANCESCA. Hence,
Thou wanton-hearted minion! hence, I say!—
And never look me in the face again!—
Hence, thou insulting slave!

RITTA. [*Clinging to her.*] O lady, lady—

FRANCESCA. Begone! [*Throws her off.*

RITTA. I have no friends—no one to love—
O, spare me!

FRANCESCA. Hence!

RITTA. Was it for this I loved—
Cared for you more than my own happiness—
Ever at heart your slave—without a wish
For greater recompense than your stray smiles?

PAOLO. [*Calls.*] Francesca!

FRANCESCA. Hurry!

RITTA. I am gone. Alas!
God bless you, lady! God take care of you,
When I am far away! Alas, alas! [*Exit weeping.*

FRANCESCA. Poor girl!—but were she all the world to me,
And held my future in her tender grasp,
I'd cast her off, without a second thought,
To savage death, for dear Paolo's sake!
Paolo, hither! Now he comes to me;
I feel his presence, though I see him not,
Stealing upon me like the fervid glow
Of morning sunshine. Now he comes too near—
He touches me—O heaven!

PAOLO. Our poem waits.
I have been reading while you talked with Ritta.
How did you get her off?

FRANCESCA. By some device.
She will not come again.



PAOLO. I hate the girl:
She seems to stand between me and the light.
And now for the romance. Where left we off?

FRANCESCA. Where Lancelot and Queen Guenevra strayed
Along the forest, in the youth of May.
You marked the figure of the birds that sang
Their melancholy farewell to the sun—
Rich in his loss, their sorrow glorified—
Like gentle mourners o'er a great man's grave.
Was it not there? No, no; 'twas where they sat
Down on the bank, by one impulsive wish
That neither uttered.

PAOLO. [*Turning over the book.*] Here it is. [*Reads.*]
"So sat
Guenevra and Sir Lancelot"—'Twere well
To follow them in that. [*They sit upon a bank.*]

FRANCESCA. I listen: read.
Nay, do not; I can wait, if you desire.

PAOLO. My dagger frets me; let me take it off. [*Rises.*]
In thoughts of love, we'll lay our weapons by.
[*Lays aside his dagger, and sits again.*]
Draw closer: I am weak in voice to-day. [*Reads*]
"So sat Guenevra and Sir Lancelot,
Under the blaze of the descending sun,
But all his cloudy splendours were forgot.
Each bore a thought, the only secret one,
Which each had hidden from the other's heart,



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Both with sweet mystery well-nigh overrun.
Anon, Sir Lancelot, with gentle start,
Put by the ripples of her golden hair,
Gazing upon her with his lips apart.
He marvelled human thing could be so fair;
Essayed to speak; but in the very deed,
His words expired of self-betrayed despair.
Little she helped him, at his direst need,
Roving her eyes o'er hill, and wood, and sky,
Peering intently at the meanest weed;
Ay, doing aught but look in Lancelot's eye.
Then, with the small pique of her velvet shoe,
Uprooted she each herb that blossomed nigh;
Or strange wild figures in the dust she drew;
Until she felt Sir Lancelot's arm around
Her waist, upon her cheek his breath like dew.
While through his fingers timidly he wound
Her shining locks; and, haply, when he brushed
Her ivory skin, Guenevra nearly swound:
For where he touched, the quivering surface blushed,
Firing her blood with most contagious heat,
Till brow, cheek, neck, and bosom, all were flushed.
Each heart was listening to the other beat.
As twin-born lilies on one golden stalk,
Drooping with Summer, in warm languor meet,
So met their faces. Down the forest walk
Sir Lancelot looked—he looked, east, west, north, south—
No soul was nigh, his dearest wish to balk:
She smiled; he kissed her full upon the mouth.”
[Kisses FRANCESCA.]
I'll read no more! [*Starts up, dashing down the book.*]

FRANCESCA. Paolo!

PAOLO. I am mad!
The torture of unnumbered hours is o'er,
The straining cord has broken, and my heart
Riots in free delirium! O, Heaven!
I struggled with it, but it mastered me!
I fought against it, but it beat me down!
I prayed, I wept, but Heaven was deaf to me;



And every tear rolled backward on my heart,
To blight and poison!

FRANCESCA. And dost thou regret?

PAOLO. The love? No, no! I'd dare it all again,
Its direst agonies and meanest fears,
For that one kiss. Away with fond remorse!
Here, on the brink of ruin, we two stand;
Lock hands with me, and brave the fearful plunge!
Thou canst not name a terror so profound
That I will look or falter from. Be bold!
I know thy love—I knew it long ago—
Trembled and fled from it. But now I clasp
The peril to my breast, and ask of thee
A kindred desperation.

FRANCESCA. [*Throwing herself into his arms.*] Take me all,
Body and soul! The women of our clime
Do never give away but half a heart:
I have not part to give, part to withhold,
In selfish safety. When I saw thee first,
Riding alone amid a thousand men,
Sole in the lustre of thy majesty,
And Guido da Polenta said to me,
"Daughter, behold thy husband!" with a bound
My heart went forth to meet thee. He deceived,
He lied to me—ah! that's the aptest word—
And I believed. Shall I not turn again,
And meet him, craft with craft? Paolo, love,
Thou'rt dull—thou'rt dying like a feeble fire
Before the sunshine. Was it but a blaze,
A flash of glory, and a long, long night?



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PAOLO. No, darling, no! You could not bend me back;
My course is onward; but my heart is sick
With coming fears.

FRANCESCA. Away with them! Must I
Teach thee to love? and reinform the ear
Of thy spent passion with some sorcery
To raise the chilly dead?

PAOLO. Thy lips have not
A sorcery to rouse me as this spell.

[*Kisses her.*]

FRANCESCA. I give thy kisses back to thee again:
And, like a spendthrift, only ask of thee
To take while I can give.

PAOLO. Give, give forever!
Have we not touched the height of human bliss?
And if the sharp rebound may hurl us back
Among the prostrate, did we not soar once?—
Taste heavenly nectar, banquet with the gods
On high Olympus? If they cast us, now,
Amid the furies, shall we not go down
With rich ambrosia clinging to our lips,
And richer memories settled in our hearts?
Francesca.

FRANCESCA. Love?

PAOLO. The sun is sinking low
Upon the ashes of his fading pyre,
And gray possesses the eternal blue;
The evening star is stealing after him,
Fixed, like a beacon, on the prow of night;
The world is shutting up its heavy eye
Upon the stir and bustle of to-day;—
On what shall it awake?

FRANCESCA. On love that gives
Joy at all seasons, changes night to day,
Makes sorrow smile, plucks out the barbed dart
Of moaning anguish, pours celestial balm
In all the gaping wounds of earth, and lulls



The nervous fancies of unsheltered fear
Into a slumber sweet as infancy's!
On love that laughs at the impending sword,
And puts aside the shield of caution: cries,
To all its enemies, "Come, strike me now!—
Now, while I hold my kingdom, while my crown
Of amaranth and myrtle is yet green,
Undimmed, unwithered; for I cannot tell
That I shall e'er be happier!" Dear Paolo,
Would you lapse down from misery to death,
Tottering through sorrow and infirmity?
Or would you perish at a single blow,
Cut off amid your wildest revelry,
Falling among the wine-cups and the flowers,
And tasting Bacchus when your drowsy sense
First gazed around eternity? Come, love!
The present whispers joy to us; we'll hear
The voiceless future when its turn arrives.

PAOLO. Thou art a siren. Sing, forever sing;
Hearing thy voice, I cannot tell what fate
Thou hast provided when the song is o'er;—
But I will venture it.

FRANCESCA. In, in, my love! [*Exeunt.*]

PEPE *steals from behind the bushes.*



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PEPE. O, brother Lanciotto!—O, my stars!—
If this thing lasts, I simply shall go mad!
[Laughs, and rolls on the ground.]
O Lord! to think my pretty lady puss
Had tricks like this, and we ne'er know of it!
I tell you, Lanciotto, you and I
Must have a patent for our foolery!
“She smiled; he kissed her full upon the mouth!”—
There's the beginning; where's the end of it?
O poesy! debauch thee only once,
And thou'rt the greatest wanton in the world!
O cousin Lanciotto—ho, ho, ho! [Laughing.] Can a man die of laughter? Here we sat;
Mistress Francesca so demure and calm;
Paolo grand, poetical, sublime!—
Eh! what is this? Paolo's dagger? Good!
Here is more proof, sweet cousin Broken-back.
“In thoughts of love, we'll lay our weapons by!”
[Mimicking PAOLO.]
That's very pretty! Here's its counterpart:
In thoughts of hate, we'll pick them up again!
[Takes the dagger.]
Now for my soldier, now for crook-backed Mars!
Ere long all Rimini will be ablaze.
He'll kill me? Yes: what then? That's nothing new,
Except to me; I'll bear for custom's sake.
More blood will follow; like the royal sun,
I shall go down in purple. Fools for luck;
The proverb holds like iron. I must run,
Ere laughter smother me.—O, ho, ho, ho! [Exit, laughing.]

SCENE II.

A Camp among the Hills. Before LANCIOTTO'S tent. Enter, from the tent, LANCIOTTO.

LANCIOTTO. The camp is strangely quiet. Not a sound
Breaks nature's high solemnity. The sun
Repeats again his every-day decline;
Yet all the world looks sadly after him,
As if the customary sight were new.
Yon moody sentinel goes slowly by,
Through the thick mists of evening, with his spear
Trailed at a funeral hold. Long shadows creep,



From things beyond the furthest range of sight,
Up to my very feet. These mystic shades
Are of the earth; the light that causes them,
And teaches us the quick comparison,
Is all from heaven. Ah! restless man might crawl
With patience through his shadowy destiny,
If he were senseless to the higher light
Towards which his soul aspires. How grand and vast
Is yonder show of heavenly pageantry!
How mean and narrow is the earthly stand
From which we gaze on it! Magnificent,
O God, art thou amid the sunsets! Ah!
What heart in Rimini is softened now,
Towards my defects, by this grand spectacle?
Perchance, Paolo now forgives the wrong
Of my hot spleen. Perchance, Francesca now
Wishes me back, and turns a tenderer eye
On my poor person and ill-mannered ways;
Fashions excuses for me, schools her heart
Through duty into love, and ponders o'er
The sacred meaning in the name of wife.
Dreams, dreams! Poor fools, we squander love away
On thankless borrowers; when bankrupt quite,
We sit and wonder of their honesty.
Love, take a lesson from the usurer,
And never lend but on security.
Captain!



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Enter a CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN. My lord.

LANCIOTTO. They worsted us to-day.

CAPTAIN. Not much, my lord.

LANCIOTTO. With little loss, indeed.
Their strength is in position. Mark you, sir,
[*Draws on the ground with his sword.*]
Here is the pass; it opens towards the plain,
With gradual widening, like a lady's fan.
The hills protect their flank on either hand;
And, as you see, we cannot show more front
Than their advance may give us. Then, the rocks
Are sorry footing for our horse. Just here,
Close in against the left-hand hills, I marked
A strip of wood, extending down the gorge:
Behind that wood dispose your force ere dawn.
I shall begin the onset, then give ground,
And draw them out; while you, behind the wood,
Must steal along, until their flank and rear
Oppose your column. Then set up a shout,
Burst from the wood, and drive them on our spears.
They have no outpost in the wood, I know;
'Tis too far from their centre. On the morrow,
When they are flushed with seeming victory,
And think my whole division in full rout,
They will not pause to scrutinize the wood;
So you may enter boldly. We will use
The heart to-day's repulse has given to them,
For our advantage. Do you understand?

CAPTAIN. Clearly, my lord.

LANCIOTTO. If they discover you,
Before you gain your point, wheel, and retreat
Upon my rear. If your attack should fail
To strike them with a panic, and they turn
In too great numbers on your small command,
Scatter your soldiers through the wood:
Let each seek safety for himself.



CAPTAIN. I see.

LANCIOTTO. Have Pluto shod; he cast a shoe to-day:
Let it be done at once. My helmet, too,
Is worn about the lacing; look to that.
Where is my armourer?

CAPTAIN. At his forge.

LANCIOTTO. Your charge
Must be at sunrise—just at sunrise, sir—
Neither before nor after. You must march
At moonset, then, to gain the point ere dawn.
That is enough.

CAPTAIN. Good-even! [*Going.*]

LANCIOTTO. Stay, stay, stay!
My sword-hilt feels uneasy in my grasp; [*Gives his sword.*]
Have it repaired; and grind the point. Strike hard!
I'll teach these Ghibelins a lesson. [*Loud laughter within.*]
Ha!
What is that clamour?

Enter hastily PEPE, tattered and travel-stained.

PEPE. News from Rimini! [*Falls exhausted.*]

LANCIOTTO. Is that you, Pepe? Captain, a good-night!
[*Exit CAPTAIN.*]
I never saw you in such straits before.
Wit without words!



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PEPE. That's better than—O!—O!— [*Panting.*] Words without wit.

LANCIOTTO. [*Laughing.*] You'll die a jester, Pepe.

PEPE. If so, I'll leave the needy all my wit.
You, you shall have it, cousin.—O! O! O! [*Panting.*]
Those devils in the hills, the Ghibelins,
Ran me almost to death. My lord—ha! ha! [*Laughing.*]
It all comes back to me—O! Lord 'a mercy!—
The garden, and the lady, and the Count!
Not to forget the poetry—ho! ho! [*Laughing.*]
O! cousin Lanciotto, such a wife,
And such a brother! Hear me, ere I burst!

LANCIOTTO. You're pleasant, Pepe!

PEPE. Am I?—Ho! ho! ho! [*Laughing.*]
You ought to be; your wife's a——

LANCIOTTO. What?

PEPE. A lady—
A lady, I suppose, like all the rest.
I am not in their secrets. Such a fellow
As Count Paolo is your man for that.
I'll tell you something, if you'll swear a bit.

LANCIOTTO. Swear what?

PEPE. First, swear to listen till the end.—
O! you may rave, curse, howl, and tear your hair;
But you must listen.

LANCIOTTO. For your jest's sake? Well.

PEPE. You swear?

LANCIOTTO. I do.

PEPE. Next, swear to know the truth.

LANCIOTTO. The truth of a fool's story!

PEPE. You mistake.
Now, look you, cousin! You have often marked—



I know, for I have seen—strange glances pass
Between Paolo and your lady wife.—

LANCIOTTO. Ha! Pepe!

PEPE. Now I touch you to the quick.
I know the reason of those glances.

LANCIOTTO. Ha!
Speak! or I'll throttle you!

[Seizes him.]

PEPE. Your way is odd.
Let go my gullet, and I'll talk you deaf.
Swear my last oath: only to know the truth.

LANCIOTTO. But that may trouble me.

PEPE. Your honour lies—
Your precious honour, cousin Chivalry—
Lies bleeding with a terrible great gash,
Without its knowledge. Swear!

LANCIOTTO. My honour? Speak!

PEPE. You swear?

LANCIOTTO. I swear. Your news is ill, perchance?

PEPE. Ill! would I bring it else? Am I inclined
To run ten leagues with happy news for you?
O, Lord, that's jolly!

LANCIOTTO. You infernal imp,
Out with your story, ere I strangle you!

PEPE. Then take a fast hold on your two great oaths,
To steady tottering manhood, and attend.
Last eve, about this hour, I took a stroll
Into the garden.—Are you listening, cousin?



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LANCIOTTO. I am all ears.

PEPE. Why, so an ass might say.

LANCIOTTO. Will you be serious?

PEPE. Wait a while, and we
Will both be graver than a church-yard. Well,
Down the long walk, towards me, came your wife,
With Count Paolo walking at her side.
It was a pretty sight, and so I stepped
Into the bushes. Ritta came with them;
And Lady Fanny had a grievous time
To get her off. That made me curious.
Anon, the pair sat down upon a bank,
To read a poem;—the tenderest romance,
All about Lancelot and Queen Guenevra.
The Count read well—I'll say that much for him—
Only he stuck too closely to the text,
Got too much wrapped up in the poesy,
And played Sir Lancelot's actions, out and out,
On Queen Francesca. Nor in royal parts
Was she so backward. When he struck the line—
"She smiled; he kissed her full upon the mouth;"
Your lady smiled, and, by the saints above,
Paolo carried out the sentiment!
Can I not move you?

LANCIOTTO. With such trash as this?
And so you ran ten leagues to tell a lie?—
Run home again.

PEPE. I am not ready yet.
After the kiss, up springs our amorous Count,
Flings Queen Guenevra and Sir Lancelot
Straight to the devil; growls and snaps his teeth,
Laughs, weeps, howls, dances; talks about his love,
His madness, suffering, and the Lord knows what,
Bullying the lady like a thief. But she,
All this hot time, looked cool and mischievous;
Gave him his halter to the very end;
And when he calmed a little, up she steps
And takes him by the hand. You should have seen
How tame the furious fellow was at once!



How he came down, snivelled, and cowed to her,
And fell to kissing her again! It was
A perfect female triumph! Such a scene
A man might pass through life and never see.
More sentiment then followed—buckets full
Of washy words, not worth my memory.
But all the while she wound his Countship up,
Closer and closer; till at last—tu!—wit!—
She scoops him up, and off she carries him,
Fish for her table! Follow, if you can;
My fancy fails me. All this time you smile!

LANCIOTTO. You should have been a poet, not a fool.

PEPE. I might be both.

LANCIOTTO. You made no record, then?
Must this fine story die for want of ink?
Left you no trace in writing?

PEPE. None.

LANCIOTTO. Alas!
Then you have told it? Tis but stale, my boy;
I'm second hearer.

PEPE. You are first, in faith.

LANCIOTTO. In truth?

PEPE. In sadness. You have got it fresh?
I had no time; I itched to reach your ear.
Now go to Rimini, and see yourself.
You'll find them in the garden. Lovers are
Like walking ghosts, they always haunt the spot
Of their misdeeds.



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LANCIOTTO. But have I heard you out?
You told me all?

PEPE. All; I have nothing left.

LANCIOTTO. Why, you brain-stricken idiot, to trust
Your story and your body in my grasp! [*Seizes him.*]

PEPE. Unhand me, cousin!

LANCIOTTO. When I drop you, Pepe,
You'll be at rest.

PEPE. I will betray you—O!

LANCIOTTO. Not till the judgment day. [*They struggle.*]

PEPE. [*Drawing PAOLO'S dagger.*] Take that!

LANCIOTTO. [*Wresting the dagger from him.*] Well meant,
But poorly done! Here's my return. [*Stabs him.*]

PEPE. O! beast! [*Falls.*]
This I expected; it is naught—Ha! ha! [*Laughing.*]
I'll go to sleep; but you—what will you bear!
Hunchback, come here!

LANCIOTTO. Fie! say your prayers.

PEPE. Hark, hark!
Paolo hired me, swine, to murder you.

LANCIOTTO. That is a lie; you never cared for gold.

PEPE. He did, I say! I'll swear to it, by heaven!
Do you believe me?

LANCIOTTO. No!

PEPE. You lie! you lie!
Look at the dagger, cousin—Ugh!—good-night! [*Dies.*]



LANCIOTTO. O! horrible! It was a gift of mine—
He never laid it by. Speak, speak, fool, speak!

[Shakes the body.]

How didst thou get it?—speak! Thou'rt warm—not dead—
Thou hast a tongue—O! speak! Come, come, a jest—
Another jest from those thin mocking lips!
Call me a cripple—hunchback—what thou wilt;
But speak to me! He cannot. Now, by heaven,
I'll stir this business till I find the truth!
Am I a fool? It is a silly lie,
Coined by yon villain with his last base breath.
What ho! without there!

Enter CAPTAIN and Soldiers.

CAPTAIN. Did you call, my lord?

LANCIOTTO. Did Heaven thunder? Are you deaf, you louts?
Saddle my horse! What are you staring at?
Is it your first look at a dead man? Well,
Then look your fill. Saddle my horse, I say!
Black Pluto—stir! Bear that assassin hence.
Chop him to pieces, if he move. My horse!

CAPTAIN. My lord, he's shoeing.

LANCIOTTO. Did I ask for shoes?
I want my horse. Run, fellow, run! Unbarbed—
My lightest harness on his back. Fly, fly! *[Exit a SOLDIER.]*
[The others pick up the body.]
Ask him, I pray you, if he did not lie!

CAPTAIN. The man is dead, my lord.

LANCIOTTO. *[Laughing.]* Then do not ask him!
[Exeunt SOLDIERS with the body.]
By Jupiter, I shall go mad, I think!
[Walks about.]



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CAPTAIN. Something disturbs him. Do you mark the spot
Of purple on his brow? [*Apart to a SOLDIER.*]

SOLDIER. Then blood must flow.

LANCIOTTO. Boy, boy! [*Enter a PAGE.*] My cloak and riding staff. Quick, quick!
How you all lag! [*Exit PAGE.*] I ride to Rimini.
Skirmish to-morrow. Wait till my return—
I shall be back at sundown. You shall see
What slaughter is then!

CAPTAIN. Ho! turn out a guard!—

LANCIOTTO. I wish no guard; I ride alone.
[*Re-enter PAGE, with a cloak and staff.*]
[*Taking them.*] Well done!
Thou art a pretty boy.—And now my horse!

Enter a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER. Pluto is saddled—

LANCIOTTO. 'Tis a damned black lie!

SOLDIER. Indeed, my lord—

LANCIOTTO. O! comrade, pardon me:
I talk at random. What, Paolo too,—
boy whom I have trotted on my knee!
Poh! I abuse myself by such a thought.
Francesca may not love me, may love him—
Indeed she ought; but when an angel comes
To play the wanton on this filthy earth,
Then I'll believe her guilty. Look you, sir!
Am I quite calm?

CAPTAIN. Quite calm, my lord.

LANCIOTTO. You see
No trace of passion on my face?—No sign
Of ugly humours, doubts, or fears, or aught
That may disfigure God's intelligence?
I have a grievous charge against you, sir,
That may involve your life; and if you doubt



The candour of my judgment, choose your time:
Shall I arraign you now?

CAPTAIN. Now, if you please.
I'll trust my cause to you and innocence
At any time. I am not conscious—

LANCIOTTO. Pshaw!
I try myself, not you. And I am calm—
That is your verdict—and dispassionate?

CAPTAIN. So far as I can judge.

LANCIOTTO. 'Tis well, 'tis well!
Then I will ride to Rimini. Good-night! [Exit.

The others look after him amazedly, and exeunt.

SCENE III.

Rimini. The Garden of the Castle. Enter PAOLO and FRANCESCA.

FRANCESCA. Thou hast resolved?

PAOLO. I've sworn it.

FRANCESCA. Ah, you men
Can talk of love and duty in a breath;
Love while you like, forget when you are tired,
And salve your falsehood with some wholesome saw;
But we, poor women, when we give our hearts,
Give all, lose all, and never ask it back.

PAOLO. What couldst thou ask for that I have not given?
With love I gave thee manly probity,
Innocence, honour, self-respect, and peace.
Lanciotto will return, and how shall I—
O! shame, to think of it!—how shall I look
My brother in the face? take his frank hand?
Return his tender glances? I should blaze
With guilty blushes.



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FRANCESCA. Thou canst forsake me, then,
To spare thyself a little bashful pain?
Paolo, dost thou know what 'tis for me,
A woman—nay, a dame of highest rank—
To lose my purity? to walk a path
Whose slightest slip may fill my ear with sounds
That hiss me out to infamy and death?
Have I no secret pangs, no self-respect,
No husband's look to bear? O! worse than these,
I must endure his loathsome touch; be kind
When he would dally with his wife, and smile
To see him play thy part. Pah! sickening thought!
From that thou art exempt. Thou shalt not go!
Thou dost not love me!

PAOLO. Love thee! Standing here,
With countless miseries upon my head,
I say, my love for thee grows day by day.
It palters with my conscience, blurs my thoughts
Of duty, and confuses my ideas
Of right and wrong. Ere long, it will persuade
My shaking manhood that all this is just.

FRANCESCA. Let it! I'll blazon it to all the world,
Ere I will lose thee. Nay, if I had choice,
Between our love and my lost innocence,
I tell thee calmly, I would dare again
The deed which we have done. O! thou art cruel
To fly me, like a coward, for thy ease.
When thou art gone, thou'lt flatter thy weak heart
With hopes and speculations; and thou'lt swear
I suffer naught, because thou dost not see.
I will not live to bear it!

PAOLO. Die,—'twere best;
Tis the last desperate comfort of our sin.

FRANCESCA. I'll kill myself!

PAOLO. And so would I, with joy;
But crime has made a craven of me. O!
For some good cause to perish in! Something
A man might die for, looking in God's face;



Not slinking out of life with guilt like mine
Piled on the shoulders of a suicide!

FRANCESCA. Where wilt thou go?

PAOLO. I care not; anywhere
Out of this Rimini. The very things
That made the pleasures of my innocence
Have turned against me. There is not a tree,
Nor house, nor church, nor monument, whose face
Took hold upon my thoughts, that does not frown
Balefully on me. From their marble tombs
My ancestors scowl at me; and the night
Thickens to hear their hisses. I would pray,
But heaven jeers at it. Turn where'er I will,
A curse pursues me.

FRANCESCA. Heavens! O, say not so!
I never cursed thee, love; I never moved
My little finger, ere I looked to thee
For my instruction.

PAOLO. But my gentleness
Seems to reproach me; and, instead of joy,
It whispers horror!

FRANCESCA. Cease! cease!

PAOLO. I must go.

FRANCESCA. And I must follow. All that I call life
Is bound in thee. I could endure for thee
More agonies than thou canst catalogue—
For thy sake, love—bearing the ill for thee!
With thee, the devils could not so contrive
That I would blench or falter from my love!
Without thee, heaven were torture!



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PAOLO. I must go. [*Going.*

FRANCESCA. O! no—Paolo—dearest!— [*Clinging to him.*

PAOLO. Loose thy hold!
'Tis for thy sake, and Lanciotto's; I
Am as a cipher in the reckoning.
I have resolved. Thou canst but stretch the time.
Keep me to-day, and I will fly to-morrow—Steal
from thee like a thief. [*Struggles with her.*

FRANCESCA. Paolo—love—
Indeed, you hurt me!—Do not use me thus!
Kill me, but do not leave me. I will laugh—
long, gay, ringing laugh—if thou wilt draw
Thy pitying sword, and stab me to the heart!

[*Enter LANCIOTTO behind.*]

Nay, then, one kiss!

LANCIOTTO. [*Advancing between them.*] Take it: 'twill be the last.

PAOLO. Lo! Heaven is just!

FRANCESCA. The last! so be it. [*Kisses PAOLO.*

LANCIOTTO. Ha!
Dare you these tricks before my very face?

FRANCESCA. Why not? I've kissed him in the sight of heaven;
Are you above it?

PAOLO. Peace, Francesca, peace!

LANCIOTTO. Paolo—why, thou sad and downcast man,
Look up! I have some words to speak with thee.
Thou art not guilty?

PAOLO. Yes, I am. But she
Has been betrayed; so she is innocent.
Her father tampered with her. I—

FRANCESCA. 'Tis false!
The guilt is mine. Paolo was entrapped



By love and cunning. I am shrewder far
Than you suspect.

PAOLO. Lanciotto, shut thy ears;
She would deceive thee.

LANCIOTTO. Silence, both of you!
Is guilt so talkative in its defense?
Then, let me make you judge and advocate
In your own cause. You are not guilty?

PAOLO. Yes.

LANCIOTTO. Deny it—but a word—say no. Lie, lie!
And I'll believe.

PAOLO. I dare not.

LANCIOTTO. Lady, you?

FRANCESCA. If I might speak for him—

LANCIOTTO. It cannot be:
Speak for yourself. Do you deny your guilt?

FRANCESCA. No! I assert it; but—

LANCIOTTO. In heaven's name, hold!
Will neither of you answer no to me?
A nod, a hint, a sign, for your escape.
Bethink you, life is centred in this thing.
Speak! I will credit either. No reply?
What does your crime deserve?

PAOLO. Death.

FRANCESCA. Death to both.

LANCIOTTO. Well said! You speak the law of Italy;
And by the dagger you designed for me,
In Pepe's hand,—your bravo?



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PAOLO. It is false!
If you received my dagger from his hand,
He stole it.

LANCIOTTO. There, sweet heaven, I knew! And now
You will deny the rest? You see, my friends,
How easy of belief I have become!—
How easy 'twere to cheat me!

PAOLO. No; enough!
I will not load my groaning spirit more;
A lie would crush it.

LANCIOTTO. Brother, once you gave
Life to this wretched piece of workmanship,
When my own hand resolved its overthrow.
Revoke the gift. [*Offers to stab himself.*]

PAOLO. [*Preventing him.*] Hold, homicide!

LANCIOTTO. But think,
You and Francesca may live happily,
After my death, as only lovers can.

PAOLO. Live happily, after a deed like this!

LANCIOTTO. Now, look ye! there is not one hour of life
Among us three. Paolo, you are armed—
You have a sword, I but a dagger: see!
I mean to kill you.

FRANCESCA. [*Whispers to PAOLO.*] Give thy sword to me.

PAOLO. Away! thou'rt frantic. I will never lift
This wicked hand against thee.

LANCIOTTO. Coward, slave!
Art thou so faint? Does Malatesta's blood
Run in thy puny veins? Take that! [*Strikes him.*]

PAOLO. And more:
Thou canst not offer more than I will bear.

LANCIOTTO. Paolo, what a craven has thy guilt
Transformed thee to! Why, I have seen the time



When thou'dst have struck at heaven for such a thing!
Art thou afraid?

PAOLO. I am.

LANCIOTTO. O! infamy!
Can man sink lower? I will wake thee, though:—
Thou shalt not die a coward. See! look here!

[Stabs FRANCESCA.

FRANCESCA. O!—O!— [*Falls.*

PAOLO. Remorseless man, dare you do this,
And hope to live? Die, murderer!
[*Draws, rushes at him, but pauses.*

LANCIOTTO. Strike, strike!
Ere thy heart fail.

PAOLO. I cannot. [*Throws away his sword.*

LANCIOTTO. Dost thou see
Yon bloated spider—hideous as myself—
Climbing aloft, to reach that wavering twig?
When he has touched it, one of us must die.
Here is the dagger.—Look at me, I say!
Keep your eyes from that woman! Look, think, choose!—
Turn here to me: thou shalt not look at her!

PAOLO. O, heaven!

LANCIOTTO. 'Tis done!

PAOLO. [*Struggling with him.*] O! Lanciotto, hold!
Hold, for thy sake! Thou wilt repent this deed.



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LANCIOTTO. I know it.

FRANCESCA. [*Rising.*] Help!—O! murder!—help, help, help!
[*She totters towards them, and falls.*]

LANCIOTTO. Our honour, boy. [*Stabs PAOLO; he falls.*]

FRANCESCA. Paolo!

PAOLO. Hark! she calls.
I pray thee, brother, help me to her side.

[LANCIOTTO *helps him to* FRANCESCA.]

LANCIOTTO. Why, there!

PAOLO. God bless thee!

LANCIOTTO. Have I not done well?
What were the honour of the Malatesti,
With such a living slander fixed to it?
Cripple! that's something—cuckold! that is damned!
You blame me?

PAOLO. No.

LANCIOTTO. You, lady?

FRANCESCA. No, my lord.

LANCIOTTO. May God forgive you! We are even now:
Your blood has cleared my honour, and our name
Shines to the world as ever.

PAOLO. O!—O!—

FRANCESCA. Love,
Art suffering?

PAOLO. But for thee.

FRANCESCA. Here, rest thy head
Upon my bosom. Fie upon my blood!
It stains thy ringlets. Ha! he dies! Kind saints,
I was first struck, why cannot I die first?



Paolo, wake!—God's mercy! wilt thou go
Alone—without me? Prithee, strike again!
Nay, I am better—love—now—O! [*Dies.*]

LANCIOTTO. [*Sinks upon his knees.*] Great heaven!

MALATESTA. [*Without.*] This way, I heard the cries.

Enter with GUIDO, ATTENDANTS, *etc.*

GUIDO. O! horrible!

MALATESTA. O! bloody spectacle! Where is thy brother?

LANCIOTTO. So Cain was asked. Come here, old men! You shrink
From two dead bodies and a pool of blood— You soldiers, too! Come here!
[*Drags MALATESTA and GUIDO forward.*]

MALATESTA. O!—O!—

LANCIOTTO. You groan!
What must I do, then? Father, here it is,—
The blood of Guido mingled with our own,
As my old nurse predicted. And the spot
Of her infernal baptism burns my brain
Till reason shudders! Down, upon your knees!
Ay, shake them harder, and perchance they'll wake.
Keep still! Kneel, kneel! You fear them? I shall prowl
About these bodies till the day of doom.

MALATESTA. What hast thou done?

GUIDO. Francesca!—O! my child!



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LANCIOTTO. Can howling make this sight more terrible?
Peace! You disturb the angels up in heaven,
While they are hiding from this ugly earth.
Be satisfied with what you see. You two
Began this tragedy, I finished it.
Here, by these bodies, let us reckon up
Our crimes together. Why, how still they lie!
A moment since, they walked, and talked, and kissed!
Defied me to my face, dishonoured me!
They had the power to do it then; but now,
Poor souls, who'll shield them in eternity?
Father, the honour of our house is safe:
I have the secret. I will to the wars,
And do more murders, to eclipse this one.
Back to the battles; there I breathe in peace;
And I will take a soldier's honour back.—
Honour! what's that to me now? Ha! ha! ha! [*Laughing.*]
A great thing, father! I am very ill.
I killed thy son for honour: thou mayst chide.
O God! I cannot cheat myself with words!
I loved him more than honour—more than life—
This man, Paolo—this stark, bleeding corpse!
Here let me rest, till God awake us all!

[Falls on PAOLO'S body.]