The Maid in the Mill
or
Love Shuffles the Cards

A Comedy
Dramatis Personae

CUPID.
ATE.

KING PHILIP OF SPAIN.
COUNT BELTRAN, a nobleman.
ANTONIO, his son.
BASIL, his nephew.
COUNT CONRAD, a young nobleman.
RONCEDAS, GUZMAN courtiers.

THE FARMER.
JACINTO, his son.
JERONIMO, a student.
CARLOS, a student.
FRIAR BALTASAR, a pedagogue.

EUPHROSYNE, the maid of the farm.
ISMENIA, sister of Conrad.
BRIGIDA, her cousin.
Act I

Scene 1

The King’s Court at Salamanca.
King Philip, Conrad, Beltran, Roncedas, Guzman, Antonio, Basil, Ismenia, Brigida; Grandees.

CONRAD
Till when do we wait here?

RONCEDAS
The Court is dull.
This melancholy gains upon the King.

CONRAD
I should be riding homeward. How long it is
To lose the noble hours so emptily.

RONCEDAS
This is a daily weariness. But look:
The King has left his toying with the tassels
Of the great chair and turns slow eyes to us.

KING PHILIP
Count Beltran.

BELTRAN
Your Highness?

KING PHILIP
What is your masque’s device
For which I still must thank your loyal pains
To cheer our stay in this so famous city?
Shall we hear it?

BELTRAN
Nothing from me, Your Highness.
Castilians, forgèd iron of old time,
And hearts that beat to tread of empires, cannot
Keep pace with dances, entertainments, masques.
But here’s my son, a piece of modern colour,
For now our forward children overstep
Their rough begetters — ask him, Sire; I doubt not
His answers shall reveal the grace men lend him
In attribution, — would ’twere used more nobly.

KING PHILIP
Your son, Lord Beltran? Surely you fatigued
The holy saints in heaven and perfect martyrs
In your yet hopeful youth, till they consented
To your best wish. What masque, Antonio?

ANTONIO
One little worthy, yet in a spirit framed
That may excuse much error; ’tis the Judgment
Of Paris and the Rape of Spartan Helen.

GUZMAN
Is that not very old?

ISMENIA
Antonio? He
Antonio? O my poor eyes misled,
Whither have you wandered?

BRIGIDA
Hush.
KING PHILIP

It has I think
Been staged a little often and though, Antonio,
I doubt not that fine pen and curious staging
Will raise it beyond new things rough conceived,
Yet is fresh subject something.

ANTONIO

For a play
It were so; this is none. Pardon me, Sir,
I err in boldness, urge too far my answer.

KING PHILIP

Your boldness, youth, is others’ modesty.
Speak freely.

ANTONIO

Thus I say then. A masque is heard
Once only and in that once must all be grasped at
But the swift action of the stage speeds on,
While slow conception labouring after it
Roughens its subtleties, blurs over shades,
Sees masses only. If the plot is new,
The mind is like a traveller pressed for time,
And quite engrossed with incident, omits
To take the breath of flowers and lingering shade
From haste to reach a goal. But the plot old
Leaves it at leisure and it culls at ease
Those delicate, scarcely-heeded strokes, which art
Throws in, to justify genius. These being lost
Perfection’s disappointed. Then if old
The subject amplifies creative labour,
For what’s creation but to make old things
Admirably new; the other’s mere invention,
A small gift, though a gracious. He’s creator
Who greatly handles great material,
Calls order out of the abundant deep,
Not who invents sweet shadows out of air.

**KING PHILIP**
You are blessed, Lord Beltran, in your son. His voice
Performs the promise of his eyes; he is
A taking speaker.

**ISMENIA**
True, O true! He has taken
My heart out of my bosom.

**BRIGIDA**
Will you hush?

**KING PHILIP**
You have, Lord Beltran, lands of which the fame
Gives much to Nature. I have not yet beheld them.
Indeed I grudge each rood of Spanish earth
My eyes have not perused, my heart stored up.
But what with foreign boyhood, strange extraction,
And hardly reaching with turmoil to power
I am a stranger merely. I have swept
Through beautiful Spain more like a wind than man,
Now fugitive, now blown into my right
On a great whirlwind of success. So tell me,
Have you not many lovely things to live with?

**BELTRAN**
My son would answer better, Sire. I care not
Whether this tree be like a tower or that
A dragon: and I never saw myself
Difference twixt field and field, save the main one
Of size, boundary and revenue; and those
Were great once, — why now lessened and by whom
I will not move you by repeating, Sire,
Although my heart speaks of it feelingly.
KING PHILIP
I have not time for hatred or revenge.
Speak then, Antonio, but tell me not
Of formal French demesnes and careful parks,
Life dressed like a stone lady, statuesque.
They please the judging eye, but not the heart.
When Nature is disnatures, all her glowing
Great outlines chillingly disharmonised
Into stiff lines, the heart’s dissatisfied,
Asks freedom, wideness; it compares the sweep
Of the large heavens above and feels a discord.
Your architects plan beauty by the yard,
Weigh sand with sand, parallel line with line
But miss the greatest, since uncultured force
Though rude, yet striking home by far exceeds
Artisan’s work, mechanically good.

ANTONIO
Our fields, Sir, are a rural holiday,
Not Nature carved.

KING PHILIP
Has she a voice to you?
Silent, she’s not so fair.

ANTONIO
Yes, we have brooks
Muttering through sedge and stone, and willows by them
Leaning dishevelled and forget-me-nots,
Wonders of lurking azure, rue and mallow,
Honeysuckle and painful meadowsweet,
And when we’re tired of watching the rich bee
Murmur absorbed about one lonely flower,
Then we can turn and hear a noon of birds.
Each on his own heart’s quite intent, yet all
Join sweetness at melodious intervals.
KING PHILIP
You have many trees?

ANTONIO
Glades, Sire, and green assemblies
And separate giants bending to each other
As if they longed to meet. Some are pranked out;
Others wear merely green like foresters.

ISMENIA
Can hatred sound so sweet? Are enemies’ voices
Like hail of angels to the ear, Brigida?

BRIGIDA
Hush, fool. We are too near. Someone will mark you.

ISMENIA
Why, cousin, if they do, what harm? Sure all
Unblamed may praise sweet music when they hear it.

BRIGIDA
Rule your tongue, madam. Or must I leave you?

KING PHILIP
You have made me sorrowful. How different
Is this pale picture of a Court, these walls
Shut out from honest breathing; God kept not
His quarries in the wild and distant hills
For such perversion. It was sin when first
Hands serried stone with stone. Guzman, you are
A patient reasoner, — is it not better
To live in the great air God made for us,
A peasant in the open glory of earth,
Feeling it, yet not knowing it, like him
To drink the cool life-giving brook nor crave
The sour fermented madness of the grape
Nor the dull exquisiteness of far-fetched viands
For the tired palate, but black bread or maize,
Mere wholesome ordinary corn. Think you not
A life so in the glorious sunlight bathed,
Straight nursed and suckled from the vigorous Earth
With shaping labour and the homely touch
Of the great hearty mother, edifies
A nobler kind than nourished is in courts?
For we are even as children, when removed
From those her streaming breasts, we of the sun
Defrauded and the lusty salutation
Of wind and rain, grow up amphibious nothing,
Not man, who are too sickly wise for earth
Nor angel, too corrupt for heirs of heaven.

GUZMAN
I think not so, Your Highness.

KING PHILIP
Not so, Guzman?
Is not a peasant happier than a king?
For he has useful physical toil and sleep
Unbroken as a child's. He is not hedged
By swathing ceremony which forbids
A king to feel himself a man. He has friends,
For he has equals. And in youth he marries
The comrade of his boyhood whom he loved
And gets on that sweet helper stalwart children.
Then vigorously his days endure till age
Sees his grandchildren climbing on his knees,
A happy calm old man; because he lived
Man's genuine life and goes with task accomplished
Thro' death as thro' a gate, not questioning.

GUZMAN
Each creature labouring in his own vocation
Desires another's and deems the heavy burden
Of his own fate the world's sole heaviness.
Each thing’s to its perceptions limited,
Another’s are to it intangible,
A shadow far away, quite bodiless,
Lost in conjecture’s wide impalpable.
On its unceasing errand through the void
The earth rolls on, a blind and moaning sphere;
It knows not Venus’ sorrows, but it looks
With envy crying, “These have light and beauty,
I only am all dark and comfortless.”
The land yearning for life, endeavours seaward,
The sea, weary of motion, pines to turn
Into reposeful earth: yet were this done
Each would repine again and hate the doer,
The land would miss its flowers and grass and birds,
The sea long for the coral and the cave.
For he who made expenditure of life
Condition of that life prolonged, made also
Each mortal gift dependent on defect
And truth to one’s own self the only virtue.
The labourer physically is divine,
Inward a void; yet in his limits blest.
But were the city’s cultured son, who turns
Watching and envious, crying “Were I simple,
Primeval in my life as he, how happy!”,
Into such environs confined, how then
His temperament would beat against the bars
Of circumstance and rage for wider field.
Uninterchangeable their natures stand
And self-confined; for so Earth made them, Earth,
The brute and kindly mother groping for mind.
She of her vigorous nature bore her sons,
Made lusty with her milk and strengthening motion
Abundant in her veins; her dumb attraction
Is as their mother’s arms, else like the lark
Aiming from her to heaven. And Souls are there
Who rooted in her puissant animalism
Are greatly earthy, yet widen to the bound
And heighten towards the sun. But these are rare
And of no privileged country citizens
Nor to the city bounded nor the field.
They are wise and royal in the furrow, keep
In schools their chastened vigour from the soil
Full-tempered. Man Antaeuslike is strong
While he is natural and feels the soil
From which being lifted great communities
Die in their intellectual grandeur. Let then
The city’s many-minded son preserve
And the clear-natured peasant unabridged
Their just, great uses, heighten or refresh
By breath and force of each a different spirit
If may be; one not admit untutored envy,
The other vain imagination making
Return to nature a misleading name
For a reversion most unnatural.

KING PHILIP
You reason well, Guzman; nor must we pine
At stations where God and his saints have set us.
And yet because I’d feel the rural air,
Of greatness unreminded, I will go
Tomorrow as a private noble, you,
My lords, forget for one day I’m the king,
Nor watch my moods, nor with your eyes wait on me
Nor disillusionize by close observance
But keep as to an equal courtesy.

MAJORDOMO
Your Majesty —

KING PHILIP
    Well, sir, Your Ancient Wisdom —

MAJORDOMO
The Kings of Spain —
KING PHILIP

Are absolute, you’d say,
Over men only? Custom masters kings.
I’ll not be ruled by your stale ceremonies
As kings are by an arrogating Senate,
But will control them, wear them when I will,
Walk disencumbered when I will. Enough.
You have done your part in protest. I have heard you.
And now, my lords.

LORDS

Your Highness is obeyed.

KING PHILIP

Tell on, Antonio. Who perform the masque?

BELTRAN

That can I tell Your Highness; rural girls,
The daughters of the soil, whom country air
Has given the red-blooded health to bloom.
Full of our Spanish sunlight are they, voiced
Like Junos and will make our ladies pale
Before them. And there’s a Farmer’s lovely daughter,
A marvel. Robed in excellent apparel,
As she will be, there’s not a maid in Spain
Can stand beside her and stay happy. My sons
Have spared nor words nor music nor array
Nor beauty, to express their loyal duty.

KING PHILIP

I am much graced by this their gentle trouble
And yet, Lord Beltran, there are nobler things
Than these brocaded masques; not that I scorn these, —
Do not believe I would be so ungracious, —
Nor anything belittle in which true hearts
Interpret their rich silence. Yet there’s one
Desire, I would exchange for many masques.
"Tis little: an easy word bestows it wholly,  
And yet, I fear, for you too difficult.

**BELTRAN**  
My lord, you know my service and should not  
Doubt my compliance. Name and take it. Else judge me.

**KING PHILIP**  
Why, noble reconcilement, Conde Beltran,  
Sweet friendship between mighty jarring houses  
And by great intercession war renounced  
Betzixt magnificent hearts: these are the masques  
Most sumptuous, these the glorious theatres  
That subjects should present to princes. Conrad  
And noble Beltran, I respect the wrath  
Sunders your pride: yet mildness has the blessing  
Of God and is religion’s perfect mood.  
Admit that better weakness. Throw your hearts  
Wide to the low knock of entering peace: let not  
The ashes of a rage the world renounces  
Smoulder between you nor outdated griefs  
Keep living. What, quite silent? Will you, Conrad,  
Refuse to me your anger, who so often  
Have for my sake your very life renounced?

**CONRAD**  
My lord, the hate that I have never cherished,  
I know not how to abandon. Not in the sway  
Of other men’s affections I have lived  
But walked in the straight road my fortunes build me.  
Let any love who will or any hate who will,  
I take both with a calm, unburdened spirit,  
Inarm my lover as a friend, embrace  
My enemy as a wrestler: do my will,  
Because it is my will, go where I go  
Because my path lies there. If any cross me,  
That is his choice, not mine. And if he suffer,
Again it is his choice, not mine. If I,
That is my star: I curse him not for it:
My fate’s beyond his making as my spirit’s
Above affection by him. I hate no man
And if Lord Beltran give to me his hand,
Gladly I’ll clasp it, easily forget
Outdated injuries and wounds long healed.

BELTRAN
You are most noble, Conrad, most benign.
Who now can say the ill-doer ne’er forgives?
Conrad has dispossessed my kinsmen, slain
My vassals, me of ancient lands relieved,
Thinned my great house; but Beltran is forgiven.
Will you not now enlarge your generous nature,
Wrong me still more, have new and ampler room
For exercise to your forgiving heart?
I do embrace misfortune and fresh loss
Before your friendship, lord.

KING PHILIP
No more of this.

BELTRAN
Pardon, Your Highness; this was little praise
For so much Christianity. Lord Conrad,
I will not trouble you further. And perhaps
With help of the good saints and holy Virgin
I too shall make me some room to pardon in.

CONRAD
I fear you not, Lord Count. Our swords have clashed:
Mine was the stronger. When I was but a boy
I carved your lands out. So had you won mine
If you had simply grappled fortune to you
And kept her faithful with your sword. ’Tis not
Crooked dexterity that has the secret
To win her. Briefly I hold your lands and satire  
Has no sharp edge, till it cut that from me.

   KING PHILIP  
This is unprofitable. No more of it.  
Lord Conrad, you go homeward with the dawn?

   CONRAD  
Winning your gracious leave to have with me  
My sisters, Sir.

   KING PHILIP  
The Queen is very loth  
To lose her favourites, but to disappoint you  
Much more unwilling.

   Exeunt King, Beltran, Guzman and Grandees.

   RONCEDAS  
A word with you, Lord Conrad.

   CONRAD  
As many as you will, Roncedas.

   RONCEDAS  
This. (whispers)  
My lord, your good friend always.

   CONRAD  
So you have been.  
Exit Roncedas.

Cousin, and sweetest sister, I am bound  
Homeward upon a task that needs my presence.  
Don Mario and his wife will bring you there.  
Are you content or shall I stay for you?

   ISMENIA  
With all you do, dear brother, yet would have
Your blessing by me.

**CONRAD**

May your happiness
Greatly exceed my widest wishes.

*Exit Conrad.*

**ISMENIA**

So
It must do, brother, or I am unhappy.
What task?

**BRIGIDA**

Some girl-lifting. What other task
Will he have now? Shall we go, cousin?

**ISMENIA**

Stay.
Let us not press so closely after them.

**BRIGIDA**

Good manners? Oh, your pardon. I was blind.

**BASIL**

Are you a lover or a fish, Antonio?
Speak. She yet lingers.

**ANTONIO**

Speak?

**BASIL**

The devil remove you
Where you can never more have sight of her.
I lose all patience.

**BRIGIDA**

Cousin, I know you’re tired
With standing. Sit, and if you tire with that,
As perseverance is a powerful virtue,
For your reward the dumb may speak to you.

ISMENIA
What shall I do, dear girl?

BRIGIDA
Why, speak the first,
Count Conrad's sister! Be the Mahomet
To your poor mountain. Hang me if I think not
The prophet's hill more moveable of the two;
An earthquake stirs not this. What ails the man?
He has made a wager with some lamp-post surely.

ISMENIA
Brigida, are you mad? Be so immodest?
A stranger and my house's enemy!

BRIGIDA
No, never speak to him. It would be indeed
Horribly forward.

ISMENIA
Why, you jest, Brigida.
I'm no such light thing that I must be dumb
Lest men mistake my speaking. Let hidden frailness
Or men suspect to their own purity
Guard every issue of speech and gesture. Wherefore
Should I be hedged so meanly in? To greet
With few words, cold and grave, as is befitting
This gentle youth, why do you call immodest?

BRIGIDA
You must not.
ISMENIA
Must not? Why, I will.

BRIGIDA
I say,
You must not, child.

ISMENIA
I will then, not because
I wish (why should I?), but because you always
Provoke me with your idle prudities.

BRIGIDA
Good! you’ve been wishing it the last half hour
And now you are provoked to’t. Charge him, charge him.
I stand here as reserve.

ISMENIA
Impossible creature!
But no! You shall not turn me.

BRIGIDA
'Twas not my meaning.

ISMENIA
Sir —

BASIL
Rouse yourself, Antonio. Gather back
Your manhood, or you’re shamed without retrieval.

ISMENIA
Help me, Brigida.

BRIGIDA
Not I, cousin.
ISMENIA

Sir,
You spoke divinely well. I say this, Sir,
Not to recall to you that we have met —
Since you will not remember — but because
I would not have you — anyone think this of me
That since you are Antonio and my enemy
And much have hurt me — to the heart, therefore
When one speaks or does worthily, I can
Admire not, nor love merit, whosoe’er
Be its receptacle. This was my meaning.
I could not bear one should not know this of me.
Therefore I spoke.

BASIL

Speak or be dumb for ever.

ISMENIA

I see, you have mistook me why I spoke
And scorn me. Sir, you may be right to think
You have so sweet a tongue would snare the birds
From off the branches, ravish an enemy, —
Some such poor wretch there may be — witch her heart out,
If you could care for anything so cheap,
And hold it in your hand, lost, — lost — Oh me!
Brigida!

BASIL

O base silence! Speak! She is Confounded. Speak, you sheep, you!

ISMENIA

Though this is so,
You do me wrong to think me such an one,
Most flagrant wrong, Antonio. To think that I
Wait one word of your lips to woo you, yearn
To be your loving servant at a word
From you, — one only word and I am yours.

BASIL
Admirable lady! Saints, can you be dumb
Who hear this?

ISMENIA
Still you scorn me. For all this
You shall not make me angry. Do you imagine
Because you know I am Lord Conrad’s sister
And lodge with Donna Clara Santa Cruz
In the street Velasquez, and you have seen it
With marble front and the quaint mullioned windows,
That you need only after vespers, when
The streets are empty, stand there, and I will
Send one to you? Indeed, indeed I merit not
You should think poorly of me. If you’re noble
And do not scorn me, you will carefully
Observe the tenour of my prohibition.
Brigida!

BRIGIDA
Come away with your few words,
Your cold grave words. You’ve frozen his speech with them.

Exeunt.

ANTONIO
Heavens! it was she — her words were not a dream,
Yet I was dumb. There was a majesty
Even in her tremulous playfulness, a thrill
When she smiled most, made my heart beat too quickly
For speech. O that I should be dumb and shamefast,
When with one step I might grasp Paradise.

BASIL
Antonio!
ANTONIO

I was not deceived. She blushed,
And the magnificent scarlet to her cheeks
Welied from her heart an ocean inexhaustible.
Rose but outcrimsoned rose. Yes, every word
Royally marred the whiteness of her cheeks
With new impossibilities of beauty.
She blushed, and yet as with an angry shame
Of that delicious weakness, gallantly
Her small imperious head she held erect
And strove in vain to encourage those sweet lids
That fluttered lower and lower. O that but once
My tongue had been as bold as were mine eyes!
But these were fastened to her as with cords,
Courage in them naked necessity.

BASIL

Ah poor Antonio. You’re bewitched, you’re maimed,
Antonio. You must make her groan who did this.
One sense will always now be absent from him.
Lately he had no tongue. Now that’s returned
His ears are gone on leave. Hark you, Antonio!
Why do we stay here?

ANTONIO

I am in a dream.
Lead where you will, since there is no place now
In all the world, but only she or silence.
Scene 2

A garden at the town-house of Count Beltran. 
Antonio, Basil.

BASIL
I am abashed for you. What, make a lady
Woo you, and she a face so excellent,
Of an address so admirably lovely
It shows a goddess in her — at each sentence
Let pause to give you opportunity,
Then shame with the dead silence of the hall
For her continual answer. Fie, you’re not
Antonio, you’re not Beltran’s issue. Seek
Your kindred in the snowdrifts of the Alps,
Or call a post your father.

ANTONIO
I deserve
Your censure, Basil. Yet were it done again,
I know I should again be dumb. My tongue
Teems in imagination but is barren
In actuality. When I am from her,
I woo her with the accent of a god,
My mind o’erflows with words as the wide Nile
With waters. Let her but appear and I
Am her poor mute. She may do her will with me
And O remember but her words. When she,
Ah she, my white divinity with that kindness
Celestial in the smiling of her eyes
And in her voice the world’s great music, rose
Of blushing frankness, half woman and half angel,
Crowned me unwooed, lavished on me her heart
In her prodigious liberality,  
Could I then speak? O to have language then  
Had been the index to a shallow love.

BASIL  
Away! you modest lovers are the blot  
Of manhood, traitors to our sovereignty.  
I'd have you banished, all of you, and kept  
In desert islands, where no petticoat  
Should enter, so the breed of you might perish.

ANTONIO  
You speak against the very sense of Love  
Which lives by service.

BASIL  
Flat treason! Was not man made  
Woman’s superior that he might control her,  
In strength to exact obedience and in wisdom  
To guide her will, in wit to keep her silent,  
Three Herculean labours. O were women  
Once loose, they would new-deluge earth with words,  
Sapiently base creation on its apex,  
Logic would be new-modelled, arithmetic  
Grow drunk and reason despairing abdicate.  
No thunderbolt could stop a woman’s will,  
Once it is started.

ANTONIO  
O you speak at ease.  
Loved you, you would recant this and without small  
Torture to quicken you.

BASIL  
I? I recant?  
I wish, Antonio, I had known your case  
Earlier. I would have taught you how to love.
ANTONIO
Come, will you woo a woman? Teach me at least
By diagram upon a blackboard.

BASIL. Well,
I will so, if it should hearten your weak spirits.
And now I think of it, I am resolved
I'll publish a new Art of Love, shall be
The only Ovid memorable.

ANTONIO Well, quickly teach
Your diagram. Suppose your maid and win her.

BASIL First, I would kiss her.

ANTONIO What, without leave asked?

BASIL Leave? Ask a woman leave to kiss her! Why,
What was she made for else?

ANTONIO If she is angry?

BASIL So much the better. Then you by repetition
Convince her of your manly strength, which is
A great point gained at the outset and moreover
Your duty, comfortable to yourself.
Besides she likes it. On the same occasion
When she will scold, I'll silence her with wit.
Laughter breaks down impregnable battlements.
Let me but make her smile and there is conquest
Act I, Scene 2

Won by the triple strength, horse, foot, artillery, Of eloquence, wit and muscle. Then but remains Pacification, with or else without The Church’s help; that’s a mere form and makes No difference to the principle.

ANTONIO There should be Inquisitions for such as you. What after?

BASIL Nothing unless you wish to assure the conquest, Not plunder it merely like a Tamerlane. I’ll teach that also. ’Tis but making her Realise her inferiority. Unanswerably and o’erwhelmingly Show her how fortunate she is to get you And all her life too short for gratitude; That you have robbed her merely for her good, To civilize her or to train her up: Punish each word that shows want of affection. Plague her to death and make her thank you for it. Accustom her to sing hosannas to you When you beat her. All this is ordinary, And every wise benevolent conqueror Has learnt the trick of it. Then she’ll love for ever.

ANTONIO You are a Pagan and would burn for this If Love still kept his Holy Office.

BASIL I Am safe from him.

ANTONIO And therefore boast securely
Conducting in imagination wars
That others have the burden of. I’ve seen
The critical civilian in his chair
Win famous victories with wordy carnage,
Guide his strategic finger o’er a map,
Cry “Eugene’s fault! Here Marlborough was to blame;
And look, a child might see it, Villars’ plain error
That lost him Malplaquet!” I think you are
Just such a pen-and-paper strategist.
A wooer!

BASIL

Death! I will have pity on you,
Antonio. You shall see my great example
And learn by me.

ANTONIO

Good! I’m your pupil. But hear,
A pretty face or I’ll not enter for her,
Wellborn or I shall much discount your prowess.

BASIL

Agreed. And yet they say, Experimentum
In corpore vili. But I take your terms
Lest you substract me for advantages.

ANTONIO

Look where the enemy comes. You are well off
If you can win her.

BASIL

A rare face, by Heaven.
Almost too costly a piece of goods for this
Mad trial.

ANTONIO

You sound retreat?
BASIL. Not I an inch. Watch how I'll overcrow her.

ANTONIO Hush, she's here.  

Enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA Señor, I was bidden to deliver this letter to you.

BASIL To me, sweetheart?

BRIGIDA I have the inventory of you in my pock, if you be he truly. I will study it. Hair of the ordinary poetic length — no; dress indefinable — no; a modest address — I think not you, Señor; a noble manner — Pooh, no! that fits not in; a handsome face — I am sure not you, Señor.

BASIL Humph.

ANTONIO Well, cousin. All silent? Open your batteries, open your batteries.

BASIL Wait, wait. Ought a conqueror to be hurried? Caesar himself must study his ground before he attempts it. You will hear my trumpets instanter.

BRIGIDA Will you take your letter, Sir?
ANTONIO
To me then, maiden? A dainty-looking note, and I marvel much from whom it can be. I do not know the handwriting. A lady’s, seemingly, yet it has a touch of the masculine too — there is rapidity and initiative in its flow. Fair one, from whom comes this?

BRIGIDA
Why, sir, I am not her signature; which if you will look within, I think you will find unforgotten.

BASIL
Here is a clever woman, Antonio, to think of that, and she but eighteen or a miracle.

ANTONIO
Well, cousin?

BRIGIDA
This Don Witty-pate eyes me strangely. I fear he will recognise me.

ANTONIO
Ismenia Ostrocadiz. O my joy!

BRIGIDA
You’re ill, sir, you change colour.

ANTONIO
Now, by heaven,
Were death within my heart’s door or his blast
Upon my eyelids, this would exile him.
The writing swims before me.

BRIGIDA
Sir, you pale
Extremely. Is there no poison in the letter?
ANTONIO
O might I so be poisoned hourly. Let me
No longer dally with my happiness,
Lest it take wings or turn a dream. Hail, letter,
For thou hast come from that white hand I worship.
"To Lord Antonio.
Señor, how you may deem of my bold wooing,
How cruelly I suffer in your thoughts,
I dread to think. Take the plain truth, Antonio.
I cannot live without your love. If you
From this misdoubt my nobleness or infer
A wanton haste or instability,—
As men pretend quick love is quickly spent —
Tear up this letter, and with it my heart.
And yet I hope you will not tear it. I love you
And since I saw our family variance
And your too noble fearfulness withhold me
From my heart's lord, I have thrown from me shame
And the admired dalliance of women
To bridge it. Come to me, Antonio! Come,
But come in honour. I am not nor can be
So far degenerate from my house's greatness
Or my pure self to love ignobly. Dear,
I have thrown from me modesty's coy pretences
But the reality I'll grapple to me
Close as your image. I am loth to end,
Yet must, and therefore will I end with this,
Beloved, love me, respect me or forget me."
Writing more sweet than any yet that came
From heaven to earth, O thou dear revelation,
Make my lips holy. Ah, could I imagine
Thee the white hand that wrote thee, I were blest
Utterly. Thou hast made me twice myself.
I think I am another than Antonio:
The sky seems nearer to me or the earth
Environed with a sacred light. O come!
I'll study to imprint this on my heart,
That when death comes he’ll find it there and leave it,  
A monument and an immortal writing.

BASIL  
Damsel, you are of the Lady Ismenia’s household?

BRIGIDA  
A poor relative of hers, Señor.

BASIL  
Your face seems strangely familiar to me. Have I not seen you in some place where I constantly resort?

BRIGIDA  
O Sir, I hope you do not think so meanly of me. I am a poor girl but an honest.

BASIL  
How, how?

BRIGIDA  
I know not how. I spoke only as the spirit moved me.

BASIL  
You have a marvellously nimble tongue. Two words with you.

BRIGIDA  
Willingly, Señor, if you exceed not measure.

BASIL  
Fair one——

BRIGIDA  
Oh, sir, I am glad I listened. I like your two words extremely. God be with you.
BASIL
Why, I have not begun yet.

BRIGIDA
The more shame to your arithmetic. If your teacher had reckoned as loosely with his cane-cuts, he would have made the carefuller scholar.

BASIL
God’s wounds, will you listen to me?

BRIGIDA
Well, Sir, I will not insist upon numbers. But pray, for your own sake, swear no more. No eloquence will long stand such drafts upon it.

BASIL
If you would listen, I would tell you a piece of news that might please you.

BRIGIDA
Let it be good news, new news and repeatable news and I will thank you for it.

BASIL
Sure, maiden, you are wondrous beautiful.

BRIGIDA
Señor, Queen Anne is dead. Tell me the next.

BASIL
The next is, I will kiss you.

BRIGIDA
Oh, Sir, that’s a prophecy. Well, death and kissing come to all of us, and by what disease the one or by whom the other, wise men care not to forecast. It profits little to study calamities
beforehand. When it comes, I pray God I may learn to take it with resignation, if I cannot do better.

Basil
By my life, I will kiss you and without farther respite.

Brigida
On what ground?

Basil
Have I not told you, you are beautiful?

Brigida
So has my mirror, not once but a hundred times, and never yet offered to kiss me. When it does, I'll allow your logic. No, we are already near enough to each other. Pray keep your distance.

Basil
I will establish my argument with my lips.

Brigida
I will defend mine with my hand. I promise you 'twill prove the abler dialectician of the two.

Basil
Well.

Brigida
I am glad you think so, Señor. My lord, I cannot stay. What shall I tell my lady?

Antonio
Tell her my heart is at her feet, and I
Am hers, hers only until heaven ceases
And after. Tell her that I am more blest
In her sweet condescension to my humbleness
Than Ilian Anchises when Love's mother
Act I, Scene 2

Strooped from her golden heavens into his lap.  
Tell her that as a goddess I revere her  
And as a saint adore; that she and life  
Are one to me, for I've no heart but her,  
No atmosphere beyond her pleasure, light  
But what her eyes allow me. Tell, O tell her —

BRIGIDA  
Hold, hold, Señor. You may tell her all this yourself. I would not remember the half of it and could not understand the other half. Shall I tell her, you will come surely?

ANTONIO  
As sure as is the sun to its fixed hour  
Or midnight to its duty. I will come.

BRIGIDA  
Good! there are at last three words a poor girl can understand. Mark then, you will wait a while after nightfall, less than half a bowshot from the place you know towards the Square Velasquez, within sight of the Donna’s windows. There I will come to you. Sir, if your sword be half as ready and irresistible as your tongue, I would gladly have you there with him, though Saint Iago grant that neither prove necessary. You look sad, Sir. God save you for a witty and eloquent gentleman.

Exit.

ANTONIO  
O cousin, I am bewitched with happiness.  
Pardon me that I leave you. Solitude  
Demands a god and godlike I am grown  
Unto myself. This letter deifies me.  
I will be sole with my felicity.

Exit.

BASIL  
God grant that I am not bewitched also! Saints and angels! How
is it? How did it happen? Is the sun still in heaven? Is that the song of a bird or a barrel-organ? I am not drunk either. I can still distinguish between a tree and the squirrel upon it. What, am I not Basil? whom men call the witty and eloquent Basil? Did I not laugh from the womb? Was not my first cry a jest upon the world I came into? Did I not invent a conceit upon my mother’s milk ere I had sucked of it? Death! and have I been bashed and beaten by the tongue of a girl? silenced by a common purveyor of impertinences? It is so and yet it cannot be. I begin to believe in the dogmas of the materialist. The gastric juice rises in my estimation. Genius is after all only a form of indigestion, a line of Shakespeare the apotheosis of a leg of mutton and the speculations of Plato an escape of diseased tissue arrested in the permanency of ink. What did I break my fast with this morning? Kippered herring? bread? marmalade? tea? O kippered herring, art thou the material form of stupidity and is marmalade an enemy of wit? It must be so. O mighty gastric juice! Mother and Saviour! I bow down before thee. Be propitious, fair goddess, to thy adorer.

Arise, Basil. Today thou shalt retrieve thy tarnished laurels or be expunged for ever from the book of the witty. Arm thyself in full panoply of allusion and irony, gird on raillery like a sword and repartee like a buckler. I will meet this girl tonight. I will tund her with conceits, torture her with ironies, tickle her with jests, prick her all over with epigrams. My wit shall smother her, tear her, burst her sides, press her to death, hang her, draw her, quarter her, and if all this fails, Death! as a last revenge, I’ll — I’ll beat her. Saints!
Scene 3

_Ismenia’s chamber._

ISMENIA
Brigida lingers. O, he has denied me
And therefore she is loth to come, for she
Knows she will bring me death. It is not so.
He has detained her to return an answer.
Yet I asked none. I am full of fear. O heart,
I have staked thee upon a desperate cast,
Which if I win not, I am miserable.
’Tis she. O that my hope could give her wings
Or lift her through the window bodily
To shorten this age of waiting, I could not
Discern her look. Her steps sound hopefully.

_Enter Brigida._

Dearest Brigida! at last! What says Antonio? Tell me quickly.
Heavens! you look melancholy.

BRIGIDA
Santa Catarina! How weary I am! My ears too! I think they
have listened to more nonsense in these twenty minutes than
in all their natural eighteen years before. Sure, child, thou hast
committed some unpardonable sin to have such a moonstruck
lover as this Antonio.

ISMENIA
But, Brigida!

BRIGIDA
And his shadow too, his Cerberus of wit who guards this poetical
treasure. He would have eaten me, I think, if I had not given him
the wherewithal to stop the three mouths of him.

ISMENIA
Why, Brigida, Brigida.

BRIGIDA
Saints! to think how men lie! I have heard this Basil reputed loudly for the Caesar of wits, the tongue and laughter of the time; but never credit me, child, if I did not silence him with a few stale pertnesses a market-girl might have devised for her customers. A wit, truly! and not a word in his mouth bullet-head Pedro could not better.

ISMENIA
Distraction! What is this to Antonio? Sure, your wits are bewildered, Brigida. What said Antonio? Girl, I am on thorns.

BRIGIDA
I am coming to that as fast as possible. Jesus! What a burning hurry you are in, Ismenia! You have not your colour, child. I will bring you sal volatile from my chamber. 'Tis in a marvellous cut bottle with a different hue to each facet! I filched it from Donna Clara’s room when she was at matins yesterday.

ISMENIA
Tell me, you magpie, tell me.

BRIGIDA
What am I doing else? You must know I found Antonio was in his garden. Oh, did I tell you, Ismenia? Donna Clara chooses the seeds for me this season and I think she has as rare a notion of nasturtiums as any woman living. I was speaking to Pedro in the summer house yesterday; for you remember it thundered terrifically before one had time to know light from darkness; and there I stood miles from the garden door —
ISMENIA
In the name of pity, Brigida.

BRIGIDA
Saints! how you hurry me. Well, when I went to Antonio in his
garden — There’s an excellent garden, Ismenia. I wonder where
Don Beltran’s gardener had his bignonias.

ISMENIA
Oh-h-h!

BRIGIDA
Well, where was I? Oh, giving the letter to Antonio. Why, would
you believe it, in thrust Don Wit, Don Cerberus, Don Subtle-
three-months.

ISMENIA
Will you tell me, you ogress, you paragon of tyrannesses, you
she-Nero, you compound of impossible cruelties?

BRIGIDA
Saints, what have I done to be abused so? I was coming to it faster
than a mail-coach and four. You would not be so unconscionable
as to ask me for the appendage of a story, all tail and nothing to
hang it on? Well, Antonio took the letter.

ISMENIA
Yes, yes and what answer gave he?

BRIGIDA
He looked all over the envelope to see whence it came, dissertated
learnedly on this knotty question, abused me your
handwriting foully.

ISMENIA
Dear cousin, sweet cousin, excellent Brigida! On my knees, I
entreat you, do not tease me longer. Though I know you would
not do it, if all were not well, yet consider what a weak tremulous thing is the heart of woman when she loves and have pity on me. On my knees, sweetest.

BRIGIDA
Why, Ismenia, I never knew you so humble in my life,—save indeed to your brother; but him indeed I do not reckon. He would rule even me if I let him. On your knees, too! This is excellent. May I be lost, if I am not tempted to try how long I can keep you so. But I will be merciful. Well, he scanned your handwriting and reviled it for the script of a virago, an Amazon.

ISMENIA
Brigida, if you will not tell me directly, without phrase and plainly, just what I want to know and nothing else, by heaven, I will beat you.

BRIGIDA
Now, this is foul. Can you not keep your better mood for fifty seconds by the clock? O temper, temper. Ah well, where was I? Oh yes, your handwriting. Oh! Oh! Oh! What mean you, cousin? Lord deliver me. Cousin! Cousin! He will come! He will come! He will come!

ISMENIA
Does he love me?

BRIGIDA
Madly! distractedly! like a moonstruck natural! Saints!

ISMENIA
Dearest, dearest Brigida! You are an angel. How can I thank you?

BRIGIDA
Child, you have thanked me out of breath already. If you have not dislocated my shoulder and torn half my hair out.
ISMENIA
Hear her, the Pagan! A gentle physical agitation and some rearrangement of tresses, ’twas less punishment than you deserved. But there! that is salve for you. And now be sober, sweet. What said Antonio? Come, tell me. I am greedy to know.

BRIGIDA
I’ll be hanged if I do. Besides I could not if I would. He talked poetry.

ISMENIA
But did he not despise me for my forwardness?

BRIGIDA
Tut, you are childish. But to speak the bare fact, Ismenia, I think he is most poetically in love with you. He made preparations to swoon when he no more than saw your name; but I build nothing on that; there are some faint when they smell a pinch of garlic or spy a cockchafer. But he wasted ten minutes copying your letter into his heart or some such note-book of love affairs; yet that was nothing either; I doubt if he found room for you, unless on the margin. Then he began drawing cheques on Olympus for comparisons, left that presently as antique and out of date, confounded Ovid and his breviary in the same quest; left that too for mediaeval, and diverged into Light and Heat, but came not to the very modernness of electricity. But Lord! Cousin, what a career he ran! He had imagined himself blind and breathless when I stopped him. I tremble to think what calamities might have ensued, had I not thrown myself under the wheels of his metaphor. The upshot is, he loves you, worships you and will come to you.

ISMENIA
O Brigida, Brigida, be you as happy as you have made me.

BRIGIDA
Truly, the happiness of lovers, children with a new plaything and
mad to handle it. But when they are tired of the game — No, I'll be the type and patroness of all spinsters and the noble army of old maids shall gather about my tomb to do homage to me.

ISMENIA
And he will come tonight?

BRIGIDA
Yes, if his love lasts so long.

ISMENIA
For a thousand years. Come with me, Brigida, and help me to bear my happiness. Till tonight!
Scene 4

A street in Madrid. 
Antonio, Basil.

ANTONIO
This is the place.

BASIL
'Tis farther.

ANTONIO
This, I know it.
Here’s the square Velasquez. There in his saddle
Imperial Charles watches the silent city
His progeny could not keep. Where the one light
Stands beckoning to us, is Don Mario’s dwelling.
O thou celestial lustre, wast thou kindled
To be her light who is my sun? If so,
Thou art most happy. For thou dost inherit
The sanctuary of her dear sleep and art
The confidant of those sweet secrecies.
Though thou live for a night, yet is thy short
And noble ministry more rich and costly
Than ages of the sun. For thou hast seen,
O blessed, her unveiled and gleaming shoulder
Make her thick-treasured hair more precious. Thou
Hast watched that face upon her heavenly pillow
Slumbering amid its peaceful curls. O more!
For thou perhaps hast laid one brilliant finger
On her white breast mastered with sacred sleep,
And there known Paradise. Therefore thou’rt famous
Above all lights that human hands have kindled.
BASIL
Here's a whole epic on an ounce of oil,
A poor, drowned wick bought from the nearest chandler
And a fly sodden in it.

ANTONIO
Listen! one comes.

BASIL
Stand back, abide not question.

ANTONIO
They'll not doubt us.
We are far from the building.

BASIL
Am I mad?
Do you think I'll trust a lover? Why, you could not
Even ask the time but you would say, "Good sir,
How many minutes to Ismenia?"

ANTONIO
Well,
Stand back.

BASIL
No need. I see it. 'Tis the she-guide,
The feminine Mercury, the tongue, the woman.

Enter Brigida.

Hark to the bell now.

BRIGIDA
You, my lord Antonio?
This way, my lord.

ANTONIO
Which way you will. I know
**Act I, Scene 4**

You are my guide to heaven.

**BRIGIDA**

O you have come?
I take this kindly of you, Señor. Tell me,
Were you not hiding when I came up to you?
What was it, Sir? A constable or perhaps
A creditor? For to be dashed by a weak girl
I know you are too bold. What did you say?
I did not hear you. We are there, my lord.
Now quietly, if you love her, your sweet lady.

*(to Basil)*

Can you be silent, Señor? We are lost else.
Scene 5

Ismenia’s antechamber.  
Ismenia waiting.

ISMENIA
It is too dark. I can see nothing. Hark!  
Surely it was the door that fastened then.  
My heart, control thyself! Thou beatst too quickly  
And wilt break in the arms of happiness.  
Brigida.

BRIGIDA
Here. Enter, my lord, and take her.

ANTONIO
Ismenia!

ISMENIA
Antonio, O Antonio!

ANTONIO
My heart’s dearest.

BRIGIDA
Bring your wit this way, Sir.  
It is not needed.  
*Exit with Basil.*

ISMENIA
O not thus! You shame me.  
This is my place, dear, at your feet; and then  
Higher than is my right.
ANTONIO
I cannot suffer
Blasphemy to touch my heaven, though your lips
Have hallowed it. Highest were low for you.
You are a goddess and adorable.

ISMENIA
Alas, Antonio, this is not the way.
I fear you do not love me, you despise me.
Come, do you not despise me?

ANTONIO
The leaf might then
Despise the moonbeam that has come to kiss it.
I love and reverence.

ISMENIA
Then you must take me,
As I have given myself to you, your servant,
Yours wholly, not to be prayed to and hymned
As a divinity but to be commanded
As a dear handmaid. You must rule me, sweet,
Or I shall spoil with liberty and lose you.

ANTONIO
Must I? I will then. Yet you are so queenly,
I needs must smile when I attempt it. Come,
Shall I command you?

ISMENIA
Do, sweet.

ANTONIO
Lay your head
Upon my shoulder so and do not dare
To lift it till I give you leave.
ISMENIA
Alas,
I fear you’ll be a tyrant. And I meant
To bear at most a limited monarchy.

ANTONIO
No murmuring. Answer my questions.

ISMENIA
Well,
That’s easy and I will.

ANTONIO
And truly.

ISMENIA
Oh,
But that’s almost impossible. I’ll try.

ANTONIO
Come, when did you first love me?

ISMENIA
Dear, today.

ANTONIO
When will you marry me?

ISMENIA
Tomorrow, dear.

ANTONIO
Here is a mutinous kingdom to my hands.
Now truly.

ISMENIA
Truly then, seven days ago,
No more than seven, at the court I saw you, 
And with the sight my life was troubled, heard you 
And your voice tore my heart out. O Antonio, 
I was an empty thing until today. 
I saw you daily, but because I feared 
What now I know, you were Lord Beltran’s son, 
I dared not ask your name, nay shut my ears 
To knowledge. O my love, I am afraid. 
Your father seems a hard vindictive man. 
What will you do with me, Antonio?

ANTONIO

Fasten

My jewel safe from separating hands 
Holily on my bosom. My father? He 
Shall know not of our love, till we are sure 
From rude disunion. Though he will be angry 
I am his eldest and beloved son, 
And when he feels your sweetness and your charm 
He will repent and thank me for a daughter.

ISMENIA

When ’tis your voice that tells me, I believe 
Impossibilities. Well, let me know — 
You’ve made me blush, Antonio, and I wish 
I could retaliate — were you not amazed 
At my mad forwardness, to woo you first, 
A youth unknown?

ANTONIO

Yes, even as Adam was 
When he first saw the sunrise over Eden. 
It was unsunlike to uplift the glory 
Of those life-giving rays, unwooed, uncourted.

ISMENIA

Alas, you flatter. Did you love me, Antonio?
ANTONIO
Three days before I had the bliss to win
The wonder of your eyes.

ISMENIA
Three days! Oh me,
Three days, Antonio? Three whole days before
I loved you?

ANTONIO
Three days, dearest.

ISMENIA
Oh,
You’ve made me jealous. I am angry. Three
Whole days! How could it happen?

ANTONIO
I will make
You compensation, dear; for in revenge
I’ll love you three whole days, when you have ceased
To love me.

ISMENIA
O not even in jest, Antonio,
Speak of such separation. Sooner shall
The sun divorce his light than we two sunder.
But you have given me a spur. I must
Love you too much, I must, Antonio, more
Than you love me, or the account’s not even.
A noise?

ANTONIO
One passes in the street.

ISMENIA
We are
Too near the window and too heedless, love.
Come this way; here ’tis safe; I fear your danger.

Exeunt. After a while enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA
No sound? Señor! Ismenia! Surely they cannot have embraced each other into invisibility. No, Cupid has flown away with them. It cannot have been the devil, for I smell no brimstone. Well, if they are so tedious I will not mortify myself with solitude either. I have set Don Cerberus on the stairs out of respect for the mythology. There he stands with his sword at point like the picture of a sentinel and protects us against a surprise of rats from the cellar; for what other wild beasts there may be to menace us, I know not. Don Mario snores hard and Donna Clara plays the violin to his bassoon. I have heard them three rooms off. These men! these men! and yet they call themselves our masters. I would I could find a man fit to measure tongues with me. I begin to feel lonely in the Alpine elevation of my own wit. The meditations of Matterhorn come home to me and I feel a sister to Monte Rosa. Certainly this woman’s fever is catching, a most calamitous infection. I have overheard myself sighing; it is a symptom incubatory. Heigh-ho! When turtles pair, I never heard that the magpie lives lonely. I have at this moment a kindly thought for all suffering animals. I begin to pity Cerberus even. I will relieve him from guard. Hist! Señor! Don Basil!

Enter Basil.

Is all quiet?

BASIL
Not a mouse stirring.

BRIGIDA
Put up your sword, pray you; I think there is no danger, and if one comes, you may draw again in time to cut its tail off.

BASIL
At your service, Señorita. If it were not treason to my wit, I
begin to feel this strip of a girl is making an ass of me. I am transformed; I feel it. I shall hear myself bray presently. But I will defy enchantment, I will handle her. A plague! Must I continually be stalemated by a will-o’-the-wisp, all sparkle and nowhere? Courage, Basil.

**BRIGIDA**
You meditate, Señor? If it be to allay the warmth you have brought from the stairs with the coolness of reflection, I would not hinder you.

**BASIL**
In bare truth, Señorita, I am so chilled that I was even about to beg of you a most sweet and warming cordial.

**BRIGIDA**
For a small matter like that, I would be loth to deny you. You shall have it immediately.

**BASIL**
With your permission, then.

**BRIGIDA**
Ah Señor, beware. Living coals are dangerous; they burn, Señor.

**BASIL**
I am proof.

**BRIGIDA**
As the man said when he was bitten by the dog they thought mad; but ’twas the dog that died. Pray, sir, have a care. You will put the fire out.

**BASIL**
Come, I have you. I will take ten kisses for the one you refused me this forenoon.
Act I, Scene 5

BRIGIDA
That is too compound an interest. I do entreat you, Sir, have a care. This usury is punishable by the law.

BASIL
I have the rich man’s trick for that. With the very coin I have unlawfully gathered, I will stop her mouth.

BRIGIDA
O sir, you are as wasteful an accountant of kisses as of words. I foresee you will go bankrupt. No more. Señor, what noise was that on the stair? Good, now you have your distance. I will ev’n trouble you to keep it. No nearer, I tell you. You do not observe the laws of the duello. You take advantages.

BASIL
With me? Pooh, you grow ambitious. Because I knew that to stop your mouth was to stop your life, therefore in pity I have refused your encounter, in pure pity.

BRIGIDA
Was it truly? Alas, I could weep to think of the violence you have done yourself for my sake. Pray, sir, do not torture yourself so. To see how goodness is misunderstood in this world! Out of pity? And made me take you for a fool!

BASIL
Well.

BRIGIDA
O no, Señor, it is not well; indeed it is not well. You shall not do this again. If I must die, I must die. You are scatheless. Pray now, disburden your intellect of all the brilliant things it has so painfully kept to itself. Plethora is unwholesome and I would not have you perish of an apoplexy of wit. Pour it out on me, conceit, epigram, irony, satire, vituperation; flout and invective, tu quoque and double-entendre, pun and quibble, rhyme and
unreason, catcall and onomatopoeia; all, all, though it be an avalanche. It will be terrible, but I will stand the charge of it.

BASIL
St Iago! I think she has the whole dictionary in her stomach. I grow desperate.

BRIGIDA
Pray, do not be afraid. I do not indeed press you to throw yourself at my head, but for a small matter like your wit, I will bear up against it.

BASIL
This girl has a devil.

BRIGIDA
Why are you silent, Señor? Are you angry with me? I have given you no cause. This is cruel. Don Basil, I have heard you cited everywhere for absolutely the most free and witty speaker of the age. They told me that if none other offer, you will jest with the statues in the Plaza Mayor and so wittily they cannot answer a word to you. What have I done that with me alone you are dumb?

BASIL
I am bewitched certainly.

BRIGIDA
Señor, is it still pity? But why on me alone? O sir, have pity on the whole world and be always silent. Well, I see your benevolence is unconquerable. With your leave, we will pass from unprofitable talk; I would be glad to recall the sound of your voice. You may come nearer, since you decline the duello.

BASIL
I thank you, Señorita. Whose sheep baaed then?
BRIGIDA
Don Basil, shall we talk soberly?

BASIL
At your pleasure, Madam.

BRIGIDA
No Madam, Señor, but a poor companion. You go to Count Beltran’s house tomorrow?

BASIL
It is so intended.

BRIGIDA
O the masque, who play it?

BASIL
Masquers, Señorita.

BRIGIDA
O sir, is this your pity? I told you, you would burst if you kept in your wit too long. But who are they by condition? Goddesses are the characters and by rule modern they should be live goddesses who play them.

BASIL
They are so.

BRIGIDA
Are they indeed so lovely?

BASIL
Euphrosyne, Christofir’s daughter, is simply the most exquisite beauty of the kingdom.

BRIGIDA
You speak very absolutely, Señor. Fairer than Ismenia?
BASIL
I speak it with unwillingness, but honestly the Lady Ismenia, rarely lovely as she is, could not stand beside this farmer’s daughter.

BRIGIDA
I think I have seen her and I do not remember so outshining a beauty.

BASIL
Then cannot you have seen her, for the wonders she eclipses, themselves speak to their disgrace, even when they are women.

BRIGIDA
Pardon me if I take you to speak in the pitch of a lover’s eulogy.

BASIL
Were it so, her beauty and gentleness deserve it; I have seen none worthier.

BRIGIDA
I wish you joy of her. I pray you for permission to leave you, Señor.

BASIL
Save one indeed.

BRIGIDA
Ah! and who was she?

BASIL
You will pardon me.

BRIGIDA
I will not press you, Sir. I do not know her, do I?
BASIL.
O 'tis not so much as that either. 'Twas only an orange-girl I saw once at Cadiz.

BRIGIDA
Oh.

BASIL.
Ha! she is galled, positively. This is as sweet to me as honey.

BRIGIDA
Well, Señor, your taste is as undeniable as your wit. Flour is the staff of life and oranges are good for a season. What does this paragon play?

BASIL
Venus; and in the after-scene, Helen.

BRIGIDA
So? May I know the others? You may find one of them to be a poor cousin of mine.

BASIL
Catriona, the bailly's daughter to Count Conrad, and Sofronia, the student Jeronimo's sister; she too is of the Count's household.

BRIGIDA
It is not then difficult to act in a masque?

BASIL
A masque demands little, Señorita. A taking figure, a flowing step, a good voice, a quick memory — but for that a speaking memory hard by in a box will do much at an emergency.

BRIGIDA
True, for such long parts must be a heavy tax on the quickest.
Basil.
There are but two such, Venus-Helen and Paris. The rest are only a Zephyr's dance in, a speech and a song to help the situation and out again with a scurry.

Brigida
God be with you. You have a learned conversation and a sober, and for such I will always report you. But here comes a colon to it. We will keep the full stop for tomorrow.

Enter Antonio and Ismenia.

Ismenia
I think the dawn moves in the east, Brigida.
Pray you, unlock the door, but noiselessly.

Brigida
Teach me not. Though the wild torrent of this gentleman's conversation have swept away half my wit, I have at a desperate peril, saved the other half for your service. Come, Sir, I have need of you to frighten the mice away.

Basil.
St Iago!

Exit Brigida with Basil.

Ismenia
Dear, we must part. I would have you my necklace,
That I might feel you round my neck for ever;
Or life be night and all men sleep, then we
Need never part: but we must part, Antonio.
Will you forget me?

Antonio
When I cease to feel.

Ismenia
I know you cannot, but I am so happy,
I love to play with my own happiness
And ask it questions. Dear, we shall meet soon.
I’ll make a compact with you, sweet. You shall
Do all my will and make no question, till
We’re married; then you know, I am your servant.
Will you, till then?

ANTONIO
Till then and after.

ISMENIA
Go now,
Love, I must drive you out or you’ll not go.

ANTONIO
One kiss.

ISMENIA
You’ve had one thousand. Well, one more,
One only or I shall never let you part.

Enter Brigida.

BRIGIDA
Are you both distracted? Is this, I pray you, a time for lingering
and near dawn over the east? Out with you, Señor, or I will set
your own Cerberus upon you, and I wager he bites well, though
I think poorly of his bark.

Exit with Antonio.

ISMENIA
O I have given all myself and kept
Nothing to live with when he’s gone from me.
My life’s his moon and I’m all dark and sad
Without him. Yesterday I was Ismenia,
Strong in myself, an individual woman.
Today I’m but the body of another,
No longer separate reality.
Well, if I gain him, let me lose myself
And I'm still happy. The door shuts. He is gone.

Reenter Brigida.

Ah, Brigida.

BRIGIDA
Come, get in, get in. Snatch a little sleep, for I promise you, you shall have none tomorrow.

ISMENIA
How do you mean by that? Or is it jest merely?

BRIGIDA
Leave me alone. I have a whole drama in my head, a play in a play and yet no play. I have only to rearrange the parts a little and tomorrow's sunlight shall see it staged, scened, enacted and concluded. To bed with you.

Exeunt.
Act II

Scene 1

A room in Conrad’s house.
Conrad, a servant.

CONRAD
Where is Flaminio?

SERVANT
He’s in waiting, Sir.

CONRAD
Call him.        Exit servant.

I never loved before. Fortune,
I ask one day of thee and one great night,
Then do thy will. I shall have reached my summit.

Enter Flaminio.

FLAMINIO
My lord?

[Work on the play was broken off here. What follows is a sketch by Sri Aurobindo of the plot of three scenes of Acts II and III.]

Act II
Scene 1. Conrad and Flaminio arrange to surprise the Alcalde’s house and carry off Euphrosyne; Brigida converses with Conrad.
Scene 2. Jacinto monologuises; Jacinto and his father; Jacinto and Euphrosyne; students, friends of Jacinto. Conrad and Euphrosyne.

Act III
Scene 1. Beltran and his sons. Ismenia, Brigida.