

THE FATEFUL GAME OF LOVE

1910

A one-act play by
Karel and Josef Čapek

Lásky hra osudná
Translated from the Czech by
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with thanks to George Pravda

CAST

PROLOGUE

GILLES, also called Peppe Nappa

TRIVALIN

DOTTORE, also called Baloardo

SCARAMOUCHE

BRIGHELLA, also called Fichetto, Finochetto, Zane

ISABELLA

ZERBINE

TIME: Now

LOCALE: The stage of one of the better theaters

The setting is the stage of a theater. In the background, otherwise somewhat dark, is a small gazebo-like structure for the two women; to one side is a bench for the convenience of members of the cast when not acting.

Please also imagine the costumes, which have nothing historical about them; the idea is that they are contemporary, except that their styling is noticeably out of the ordinary.

GILLES wears a large white satin suit with frills on the breast and sleeves; he is powdered; he has fair, delicate hands and short, fleecy hair; he is a decadent of seraphic countenance and a sympathetic character; he is not Pierrot.

TRIVALIN has a yellow satin bolero with wide, black, horizontal stripes, a silk cummerbund, loose white trousers with a general's black stripe down the side and black cuffs, two-toned shoes and a gaudy cravat; he has large curls over his forehead like those between the horns of a bull; his makeup is brick red; his bearing is heroic and the proportions of his body are huge.

BRIGHELLA is dressed in a gray suit with a cutaway jacket and thin, vertical white stripes, a short black cloak, and patent-leather shoes as narrow as a fox's snout; he always carries one shoulder higher than the other, rather deceitfully; his makeup is yellowish, his skull is elongated and flat on top like that of a snake, and he seems on the whole to be the most ordinary of the lot. As he takes pains to keep himself apart from the others, he prefers to stand in the wings near the proscenium.

As for PROLOGUE, he is an ordinary theater manager, overweight and jovial, a type somewhere between a philistine and a bohemian.

DOTTORE is clad all in black, like a parson, with a black porkpie hat and turned-down collar; on his shoulders is a small black cape; he is a little comical, like all moralists without authority.

SCARAMOUCHE wears a modified clown suit checkered in black, suggestive on the whole of an American eccentric.

Of the two women, ISABELLA wears a dress of modest length and modest décolletage, with pink ribbons and flounces (in dancing-class style) and carries her black handbag the way certain self-sufficient girls often do. She has sweet, blue, quite innocent eyes with sweet, blue, quite sinful circles underneath. Her acting is bad, but she tries to be liked. Her nature is extremely simple.

ZERBINE looks like an old lady from the congregation or a procuress; she is a composite of flounces, ruffles, pleats and laces, all in gray, with a rosary and a workbag containing the beginnings of a knitted sock.

THE FATEFUL GAME OF LOVE

PROLOGUE

My lords, permit me, please, to introduce these people here, before they introduce themselves by their performances; and I, though not their boss, must necessarily introduce myself. Permit me, then:

I'm Prologue. (He bows.) And these people here are actors.

Yes, my friends, they're actors, and what we are standing on are merely boards and not, as you can see, the solid ground itself.

These trees, you know, are only daubs of paint; these rosy cheeks are not a blush, but rouge; (he touches ISABELLA's face) and this is powder. Let

me say again,

they're actors, and they won't pretend that they are — God knows what, a better breed perhaps than mere artistes, as others may pretend, proclaiming publicly: I'm Caesar; Brutus, I; and I, Antonio; or, I am Julia.

This is a tree, and that's a house, and there you have the countryside; you see? — real soil! Well, as I've told you, these are actors and they want to play for you. What would you like to see? A play of sweet and blissful love;

or infidelity, the burning guilt
of crime so beautifully portrayed that tears
will wash your eyes and wet your cheeks; or how
the trials of life severely test a maiden's
purity; or something for a laugh;
or something deeply sad which hurts the hero
— but not you; it's all the same to us.
The actors which you see assembled here
will play for you — the fateful game of love.
Well, mummers mine, come near, the time has come
to introduce you now.

My lords and ladies,
meet Peppe Nappa, also known as Gilles;
our lyric talent, le pâle amant de la lune,
his sign is Virgo; he was born one night
when white and candid Moon in transit crossed
the path of shining Venus; that's why he's
so frail, a passive lamb, a bit distraught;
our own poetic streak, our Gilles; he'll win you
with the beauty of his soul.

My lords and ladies,
here Travalin stands: so strong, the epic
element; with stormy passions filled
— my ladies, note! A man complete, Trivalin,
standing here, his manly head bowed down;
prepared for deeds, my ladies, at all times.
The classic type!

And here, my honored friends,
is Scaramouche — forgive me if I boast,
dear patrons — Scaramouche: our comic talent,
a true and natural clown, not just a mask
behind which pain, and sometimes wisdom, dwell;
not just a mask that hides some tendency
to moralize, like other fools in troupes
of lesser grade; true art will have true fools,
and that is Scaramouche. Your noble hearts
will open to him also.

Next, dear guests,
is Isabella: neither ingénue
nor heroine, nor scheming creature, but —
a woman, and that's all; and that's the part
she plays tonight. I feel you'd like to ask
if it's a comic part she plays, or tragic.
The truth is, I don't know; it varies with
the play and circumstances. But her charm
endears her to us all, whatever role.
You'll love her, too.

And here's her aunt, Zerbine.
She's very old indeed and doesn't act
at all.

My high and gentle folk, this is
Dottore, also known as Baloardo;
a learned man, with multiple degrees
and therefore very wise. He used to play

the leads, and later on the fool; and now
that he is old, he has become a sage
and scatters little moral observations
throughout the play to benefit the players.
You could say Dottore represents
a sort of guardian of public virtue
and morality.

And now — Brighella,
called Fichetto, also Finechetto,
and sometimes known as Zane, too. His business —
intrigue; I beg your pardon. He may seem
somewhat evil in his character,
but evil's useful in a play; for often
passions and intrigue are intertwined,
as are a weaver's countless strands, and thus
are woven all those intricate designs
of vast complexity that we call fate.
Well, Zane's very nice —

GILLES

You call him nice?

My God, if only I were not so weak!
If only I were not so passive, as Prologue says,
I'd kill him.

PROLOGUE

But my good Gilles . . .

GILLES

I can't be good. Let me speak, please!

PROLOGUE But Gilles, if you speak at all, you should speak in verse.

GILLES I can't speak in verse now, and I'm asking you to let me speak.

PROLOGUE For heaven's sake, Mr. Gilles, don't drag in private matters, at least not in front of the audience.

GILLES No, I want the public to hear what kind of man Brighella is, so they can make up their own minds about Zane! They should know all about him, they should know that Brighella draws and writes pornography and sells it on the sly, they should know that Fichetto tells the manager slanderous lies about us, and they should hear about some other things, too!

PROLOGUE My dearest Gilles, it is not true, let it alone. Or at least make your complaint in verse, as you're supposed to do.

GILLES I won't speak in verse! The audience should know that Brighella gets a commission for finding rich farmers for Zerbine to take to Isabella.

TRIVALIN Is that true, Gilles?

PROLOGUE No, Mr. Trivalin, it's not true. How can you say such things about Zerbine?

ZERBINE (leading ISABELLA by the hand) Gentlemen, she's still a child. She's completely innocent, and look how nicely she's grown! I've brought her up. I'm her aunt.

TRIVALIN You're not her aunt, Zerbine, and anyway, you're a liar.

ZERBINE By all that's holy, Mr. Trivalin, I speak the truth. As I believe in God, Isabella is still a virgin.

BRIGHELLA A virgin, a virgin! Anybody who believes that can ask Dottore here.

DOTTORE What are you saying, Brighella? How could I possibly know?

BRIGHELLA I don't know, Dottore. All right, then, perhaps somebody should ask Scaramouche.

SCARAMOUCHE (perturbed) God preserve us, I know nothing. You'd better ask Brighella.

BRIGHELLA I don't want to know anything. I'm sorry I've interfered in your business. What do I care?

PROLOGUE

Well, gentlemen, let's stop arguing and start the play.
Please —

My lords, forgive our wasting precious time
in fruitless quarrels. Now the play begins,
as all plays do. Believe me when I say
you will be deeply moved; for in its course,
human pain will clash with human passion,
good with evil, gravity with fun;
and dreams will face the facts, and our good Doctor
will face the fool, for this has always been
our custom. Just be kind to us, dear friends,
and when you cry or laugh — that's our reward:
that is the dearest price that you can pay
to join us as we now begin our play.

(He bows and exits. DOTTORE and SCARAMOUCHE
remain in front; the rest move upstage)

SCENE 1

DOTTORE

My esteemed audience! My lords, dear ladies, honorable
clergymen, diligent citizens! As the oldest member of our
ensemble I welcome you in our midst and I would like to
ask you a question: Why have you come here? To be
entertained? I am afraid you will not be entertained here as
well as if you stood before a monkey's cage. Or have you

come here because of our art? If we do our best, you will begin to believe that we are real people and you'll forget that we are artists. Why then have you come here? Why do we actually perform in front of you? I say, for the purpose of taking away with you some degree of illumination, of moral purification, of that catharsis of which, as is very well known to you, my dear ladies, speaks Aristotle. You will see here the august and the base, the moral and the evil, the tragic and the ordinary in mutual struggle; you will fear for the good, you will sympathize with the suffering, but you will be happy in the end when you will see truth, honor and morality prevail, as is proper on stage as well as in life. Once more, welcome!

SCARAMOUCHE We shall endeavor that the time will pass well for you, as is proper on stage as well as in life; that you should not consider that while you're sitting here your wives at home may be unfaithful to you or your husbands have the opportunity to deceive you; that meanwhile your servants are reading your mail and thieves are breaking into your houses. Perhaps right now murderers are crawling under your beds! Have you locked up everything well? Are you sure you haven't left the front door open? Better go home and have a look; we can do this play some other time.

DOTTORE Scaramouche!

SCARAMOUCHE Yes, yes — (looks around) What a lovely theater! We've never played in such a beautiful theater!

DOTTORE Scaramouche!

SCARAMOUCHE Right away! A very fine audience. First class! How many are out there, do you think?

(DOTTORE is distraught; he reproaches SCARAMOUCHE with his eyes)

It's very nice up here, very nice. We've got a good place here, Dottore, we can see the audience very well. If they knew how nice it is up here —

DOTTORE Scaramouche!

SCARAMOUCHE Very nice up here! I'm very happy with it! Shall we go, Dottore? Thank you, very pleased to have met you!

(He bows to the audience and likewise to DOTTORE, and they go upstage. BRIGHELLA and TRIVALIN come forward simultaneously)

SCENE 2

(GILLES, TRIVALIIN, BRIGHELLA. In the background, DOTTORE and SCARAMOUCHE)

BRIGHELLA My dear Gilles —

GILLES I am not working with you.

BRIGHELLA My dear Trivalin —

TRIVALIN Leave me alone! I won't work with you.

BRIGHELLA Gentlemen, are you cross with me because of Isabella?
Both? Because of Isabella? It's odd, both of you,
because of Isabella.

TRIVALIN Why are you surprised that the reason is Isabella?

BRIGHELLA I am surprised at both of you, my dear Trivalin.

GILLES Why are you surprised at both of us, Brighella?

BRIGHELLA Because the reason is Isabella, my dear sir. But I want
to tell you something else. Look, what lovely legs
Isabella has; have you ever seen such legs, gentlemen?

SCARAMOUCHE (in the background) Since when are Isabella's legs
something new?

BRIGHELLA But I've come to tell you something entirely different.
Isabella told me that from now on she would like to —
how shall I put it — to be devoted to only one man.

TRIVALIN Which one, Brighella?

BRIGHELLA I don't know, gentlemen. Only one man. On my honor, I don't know who it is, but I would like to be in his shoes. Isabella is a beautiful woman!

TRIVALIN And why hasn't she been devoted to one man?

BRIGHELLA I don't know, gentlemen. Evidently Zerbine doesn't allow it, because Zerbine wants every man to show his money first. That is to say, she is lending at interest the money she gets from the gentlemen she takes to Isabella.

GILLES My God! That pimp! (throws himself to the ground)

BRIGHELLA (squats next to him) What's the matter with you, Gilles? Should Dottore bleed you?

TRIVALIN Leave him alone, Brighella, I think it's only asthma. Did you say, Zane, that Isabella wants to be devoted to one man?

BRIGHELLA That's right, Mr. Trivalin. But my dear Gilles, what's happened to you? Don't you feel well?

GILLES Leave me alone! Oh, that contemptible woman!

BRIGHELLA Isabella?

GILLES No, Zerbine! Isabella is her victim. Isabella is a saint. Who could say that Isabella is not a saint?

BRIGHELLA Nobody, Mr. Gilles. Isabella is a girl of good character. It's all Zerbine's doing.

GILLES I didn't know what kind of money it was. I didn't know what shame, what pain was connected to it!

BRIGHELLA That comes from borrowing money from women. I don't feel sorry for you.

TRIVALIN (gloomily) So it's all Zerbine's doing.

GILLES (gets up) Let's kick Zerbine out of the company.

BRIGHELLA We can't do it alone, my dear Gilles. You'd better tell her that the manager will throw her out if she doesn't stop shaming our troupe with her pandering. The manager told me so himself.

TRAVILIN Gilles, tell her! Perhaps it will frighten her.

BRIGHELLA Go; go, my dear Gilles, don't think about it too long. Better go right now, or Zerbine might bag some

distinguished gentleman from the audience for Isabella.
Well, go on!

(GILLES exits, resignedly)

SCENE 3

(BRIGHELLA, TRIVALIN)

BRIGHLLA And now, my good Trivalin, I can tell you; you are the man
to whom Isabella wants to be devoted. She confided in me.

TRIVALIN Don't lie, Zane, that's not true.

BRIGHELLA My word of honor, Trivalin, she did tell me. Why should
I lie? It makes no difference to me.

TRIVALIN Good Zane, tell Isabella that I love her.

BRIGHELLA Very well, I shall reassure her. She also has told me that
you should try to win over old Zerbine.

TRIVALIN How should I do that?

BRIGHELLA I don't know. You could give Zerbine some presents.
She likes that.

TRIVALIN I've got no money, Brighella.

BRIGHLLA That's a trifle. You see, I have a little sum I've earned through my literary efforts. I shall trust you — why not? Let's be friends, Trivalin. I'll lend you five hundred at thirty percent — which, by the way, is nothing. Zerbine demands much more. Look, see how Isabella smiles . . .

TRIVALIN I think you're asking too much, Zane,

BRIGHELLA But my dear Trivalin, you have enormous prospects. Heroic characters are becoming more and more popular with audiences. In a year's time you'll certainly be working for some permanent company, don't you think?

TRIVALIN Yes, I do. Brighella, you're right!

BRIGHELLA And one more thing. Gilles owes Zerbine about four hundred. I mean, his earnings can't even pay for his silk underwear. After all, he wants to charm Isabella.

TRIVALIN Isabella!

BRIGHELLA Of course. Don't be blind. He who sees, sees a lot: that Gilles is quarreling with Zerbine now, for instance; that Zerbine is cross and wants her money back; and that Gilles will come to me now, crying for help. And I can't refuse

him a loan unless I can prove to him that I have lent my money to someone else.

TRIVALIN I understand. Give me the money.

BRIGHELLA For the moment only an unsigned check, my dear Trivalin; and now bring me an IOU, so that I can show it to Gilles right away. Dottore and Scaramouche will co-sign for you. If I'm not mistaken, Dottore has some money and Scaramouche has a little house in his home town. Well, go on; I'll sign the check later. In the meantime, I'll do a scene of some sort with Gilles. Go quickly, Trivalin, before Gilles comes back.

(TRIVALIN exits, accompanied by DOTTORE and SCARAMOUCHE)

SCENE 4

(BRIGHELLA alone)

BRIGHELLA (signs the note and then —) What, I should act alone? I have nothing to say. Whoever would like to speak with me, let him do so in private, just between us two. I don't like talking into thin air. I'm not here to entertain anybody. I need nobody; I'm an independent man. Sorry, I have nothing to say.

(GILLES comes back with an expression of helplessness)

SCENE 5

(GILLES, BRIGHELLA)

GILLES Zerbine told me that the manager could not kick her out because he owes her money. Oh, my God! Where's Trivalin?

BRIGHELLA He's gone to the box office. What do you want from him?

GILLES Nothing. Brighella, just between us, lend me five hundred. I borrowed it from Zerbine, and now I'd like to throw the filthy stuff in her face, because my love for Isabella seems stained by this shameful money.

BRIGHELLA My dear Gilles, I have nothing. Your delicate feelings must be patient.

GILLES Brighella, lend me five hundred! Zerbine wants her money by tomorrow morning.

BRIGHELLA But I don't have it, my boy. Honestly.

GILLES Brighella, I am ruined. Where can I get the money by

tomorrow morning?

BRIGHELLA My dear, I have no idea. You could print it.

GILLES Zane, don't you understand how unhappy I am?

BRIGHELLA Yes, I do. But that's a mere trifle. I know something far worse, dear Gilles. Trivalin has money, and he wants to live with Isabella. Zerbine will no doubt arrange it.

GILLES (frightened) No!

BRIGHELLA You know Zerbine would do anything for money. I'm telling you, Trivalin will get Isabella!

GILLES (desperate) No!

BRIGHELLA I swear to you, my dear Gilles, it's true. It should be decided by tonight.

GILLES No!

BRIGHELLA Trivalin is in a hurry because he is afraid of you. He thinks Isabella favors you — which she does.

GILLES Brighella, does she?

BRIGHELLA I don't know, my dear Gilles, but do you really believe that Isabella could love Trivalin? That bull, that crude, trivial strength? That base and brutal Trivalin?

GILLES Oh!

BRIGHELLA Don't you know, Gilles, that you must charm a woman with your soul? A woman longs for a poet, Gilles, she yearns for an inspired lover, a lute strung with feeling. Don't you know that a woman loves a poet?

GILLES Oh!

BRIGHELLA Don't you know that a woman wants to be conquered by sensitivity? Wrap yourself in soulfulness, clothe yourself in shining imagery, adorn yourself with the brilliance of a poet! Peppe Nappa! Don't you know that a woman submits to the spirit?

GILLES Oh! Is that true?

BRIGHELLA I don't know, my dear, find out for yourself. Search, discover, and be happy. Isabella, dear, come over here for a moment. Mr. Gilles would like to talk with you. (to the audience) Mr. Gilles will speak with Isabella.

ISABELLA approaches)

and then, with arms outspread, I spoke to her;
I cried out; I am not yet dead, not yet,
when you do love me!

No, a different dream:

I dreamt of us, my love, we two inside
a carriage while stout horses carried us
through ancient cities in the midst of night,
across rough cobblestones, down long, dark lanes,
past silent fields and sleeping villages;
the moonlight falls on distant, baying hounds
and we drive on . . .

No, it was otherwise:

I dreamt of you, and in my dream of you
I had become a poet of renown —
Oh, I'm so happy, Isabella! Please,
look at me and tell me if you see
me smiling now.

ISABELLA

Oh, Mr. Gilles, I do.

GILLES

Then I am happy.

BRIGHELLA

Pardon me, my dears, for
interrupting, but I fear I must. Permit me, my dear
Isabella. Just a word with you, Gilles.

SCENE 7

(GILLES, BRIGHELLA)

BRIGHELLA Forgive me, Gilles, but this is not the time for lyrical outpourings. Remember that Isabella is at stake.

GILLES I love her so and I am so unhappy that I am shedding tears; and then again, so happy that a flood of joy spills over from my eyes, and then I cry with pain.

BRIGHELLA Stop this, Gilles. I don't understand poetry.

GILLES All I'm saying is, I cry with pain; and then again I'm happy, for I love her; and I'm unhappy, too.

BRIGHELLA All right, Gilles, another time. You'd better take care now that Trivalin doesn't get, or rather doesn't buy, your Isabella.

GILLES Brighella, what am I do to?

BRIGHELLA My dear Peppe, you can't possibly court Isabella. Remember that you are a ruined man with an utterly insecure existence.

GILLES But my acting prospects —

BRIGHELLA Don't deceive yourself, my dear Peppe: they are miserable. To tell you the truth, the public is fed up with lyrical characters. The public demands pathos, action, heroism and tragic figures on the stage.

GILLES Don't I suffer enough? Aren't I tragic enough?

BRIGHELLA But you don't do anything, my dear Gilles. The public wants to see action, a hero, a dynamic character. Deeds, Gilles, deeds are needed on the stage. Action!

GILLES I would like to be a dancer . . .

BRIGHELLA You should want only Isabella, Gilles! You must kidnap her during tonight's performance.

GILLES Kidnap!

BRIGHALLA In the name of your love for Isabella, kidnap her! In the name of morality, Gilles, free her from the power of that old hag. Kidnap Isabella, Peppe Nappa!

GILLES (enraptured) We two inside the carriage, while stout horses fly through sleepy midnight towns and —

BRIGHELLA Of course you will. Kidnap Isabella, Gilles!

GILLES across rough cobblestones, down narrow lanes,
past silent fields and sleeping villages;
the moonlight falls on distant, baying hounds,
and through the moonlit night we'll travel on;
and everything will be the way I dreamt it —
I'm happy, Brighella!

BRIGHELLA All right, Gilles, I'm happy for you. You also should
realize that your victory over Trivalin will be, in a way,
a victory of poetry, inspiration and spirit over brute
force.

GILLES Brighella, I feel that I am a poet and that I shall die with
glory.

BRIGHELLA Exactly my opinion, dear Peppe. Besides, my dear Gilles,
this kidnapping will make you the center of attention, and
you will advance to playing the hero, and that will enhance
your financial status.

GILLES I'd like to play the hero. The salary is immaterial.

BRIGHELLA Well, it is material. You must act, Gilles, you must act
now.

GILLES I shall take Isabella into my confidence.

BRIGHELLA God preserve us! If you want to move up to heroic roles, you must kidnap Isabella by force! And now go order a carriage with stout horses.

GILLES I can't do it. Trivalin might see me and suspect what I'm up to.

BRIGHELLA Well, in that case you must leave inconspicuously. Say that you're ill — you have a weak constitution anyway. Look, Trivalin is coming back.

(Enter TRIVALIN, DOTTORE, SCARAMOUCHE)

SCENE 8

(GILLES, TRIVALIN, BRIGHELLA, DOTTORE, SCARAMOUCHE and, later, ZERBINE)

TRIVALIN This is a strange theater! I couldn't find pen nor ink anywhere in the building.

SCARAMOUCHE I'd like to know how the scripts are edited!

BRIGHELLA With a toothpick, my dear. My God, what's the matter with you, Gilles? You're so pale!

GILLES Ah, help me, please! My heart is gripped in pain; I can scarcely breathe the life-supporting air. I'm suffocating! For the love of God, please help!

DOTTORE (raises GILLES so that the audience can see him)
You see here an affliction of the heart,
vitium cordis, which is caused in part
by dancing, love and self-reproach; I'm sure
extracta recte rara is the cure,
an elixir whose worth defies description —
but it's not my part to offer a prescription.

(DOTTORE and SCARAMOUCHE carry out GILLES)

SCENE 9

(TRIVALIN, BIGHELLA)

TRIVALIN I can't stand Gilles; he is a complete weakling.

BRIGHELLA (takes the check out of Trivalin's hand) What do you mean, weakling? Listen, Trivalin: Gilles plans to kidnap Isabella — tonight.

TRIVALIN What?

BRIGHELLA I'm only saying that women are fickle.

TRIVALIN Doesn't Isabella love me?

BRIGHELLA Oh yes, she does, my dear sir. She is aflame with passion for you, mad with love, devoured by desire. But women are empty-headed, dear sir, and Gilles knows how to charm them with his smooth and flattering tongue. Has he not often talked the audience into booing you because you played his adversary?

TRIVALIN And Isabella?

BRIGHELLA Weakness! Weakness! I only know that Gilles loves Isabella.

TRIVALIN Damnation! Isabella loves him?

BRIGHELLA Foolish Trivalin! Do you think that Isabella could seriously love Gilles, that sugarcane, that sweetness under the tongue, that mixed-up dandy who paints his face like a harlot and is so thoroughly sick inside?

TRIVALIN No!

BRIGHELLA That "artiste"! That lunatic! That braggart, that buffoon, that fool! Do you really think Isabella could love Gilles?

TRIVALIN Isabella? No!

BRIGHELLA (Carefully) I am not so sure she could not, my dear Trivalin. I, for example, could not love Gilles — but let us suppose he did kidnap Isabella: then she would surely begin to feel a kind of respect for him, and respect is halfway on the road to love. Respect, dear sir, because kidnapping is action.

TRIVALIN Action?

BRIGHELLA Yes, my dear Trivalin. Women love action, courage, physical force. Besides which, Gilles would have conquered you, in a way, and women have always loved a conqueror.

TRIVALIN I? Conquered by Gilles?

BRIGHELLA Women love that sort of thing, you know. (he loses interest in TRIVALIN) As woman is made to be conquered, she longs to be conquered by a strong man — my dear Trivalin, that is a law of nature: women love a hero, and there's nothing you can do to change it.

TRIVALIN Ah, Gilles!

BRIGHELLA What?

TRIVALIN Woe to you, Gilles! Be on your guard!

BRIGHELLA (eagerly) My dear Trivalin, woman is weak and therefore addicted to heroism. A woman, my dear sir, adores blood on a man's hands, and she wants to be the spoils. To the winner go the spoils; and will it be worth it? I don't say no!

TRIVALIN Where is Isabella?

BRIGHELLA Who? What? The spoils? I don't know who'll win her. Perhaps the one who is the master of his tongue, the virtuoso on his lute, the pinnacle of beauty, the embodiment of charm. Who knows? It doesn't matter to me!

TRIVALIN Enough, Brighella. Where is Isabella?

BRIGHELLA (calls) Isabella, dear young lady, please come here; Trivalin would like to talk to you.
My ladies, here's Trivalin, strong and steady;
a man of deeds, dear ladies, ever ready. (steps aside)

SCENE 10

(ISABELLA, TRIVALIN; later BRIGHELLA)

ISABELLA Oh, Trivalin. (she bows)

TRIVALIN (bowing) May I speak with you?
No, not speak, for speech is the device
that liars use; but surely honest people
can speak of love without those artful words
that spring to life from just inside the mouth
and flow attractively past gleaming teeth
to form those charming platitudes and lies
called “clever talk.” Be careful, little bird,
for smooth and tempting speeches are like snakes,
entangling you in cunning, slippery knots,
and you’ll be helpless — do you think this fair
and worthy of a man?

ISABELLA Oh, no, Trivalin!

TRIVALIN Let someone else mouth flattery and lies
and honeyed words, till from his painted lips
rouge dribbles on his chin. I’ll only say,
with deepest adoration, that I love you.

ISABELLA And I love you, Trivalin.

TRIVALIN You love me?

ISABELLA Oh, yes!

TRIVALIN Praise God! I love you so — so much

that — so much I love you that — Oh, wretched words,
to betray me like false servants! You are only
empty sounds, unable to express
the emotion that now rises to my lips
and longs to have a name; elusive words,
my poor tongue fumbles at my teeth to find you,
but you slip away and vanish; you're too smooth
for me to seize and capture with my lips
and then bring forth. Oh, Isabella, listen:
to prove my love, I'd like to shake this house
so that its shattered roof comes crashing down
on all our patrons here.

ISABELLA

Oh, yes, Trivalin!

TRIVALIN

(kisses her) All manhood is a gift from women's hands;
only he is strong who is a lover,
and the weakness of a woman turns to strength
and awesome deeds when she is linked with man.
Give me weapons, for I want to act,
to live, to kill, to break this stormy tension
and be spent — so give me weapons now:
I thirst for action!

We are filled with love,
and though you melt love with your sighs, a man
must thrust love in the fiery forge of action.
Give me weapons now! You, gentlemen,

seated there below, let those of you
who will, come forward: pit your strength with mine
for Isabella! Is there someone present
who would like to swear his love and try to claim her?
Let him step forward, then, for I am ready
to measure my love's strength against his own.
I challenge him to fight!

BRIGHELLA

And Gilles?

TRIVALIN

Step forward,

whoever would call Isabella his!
This challenge is my third.

BRIGHELLA

And Gilles?

TRIVALIN

(embraces Isabella)

My dearest,

this is the first day of my life, and I
am strengthened by your love. (kisses ISABELLA)

BRIGHELLA

Trivalin, ladies,

always geared for action —

TRIVALIN

Give me weapons!

BRIGHELLA

Behold the female idol, drunk with passions:
this, please believe me, is the real Trivalin.

but calmly, gentlemen; and each of you
please clasp a lady to your breast, then leave;
thus serving both of you by these abductions
— but gently, please, according to instructions.

(he bows and leaves with dignity)

DOTTORE Where to, Scaramouche?

SCARAMOUCHE (halting) I have to go.
‘Tis not indecency, but naturalness;
for what is natural brings happiness.

DOTTORE Scaramouche! There are things one does not —

SCARAMOUCHE You misunderstand me, Dottore, I only want to step
aside so that these two can be alone. That’s why I’ve
been sending the audience away, because the audience
isn’t tactful enough to leave when they see two actors
making love on the stage. (he leaves, muttering)

(he returns, in his left hand a huge traveling bag, over his
shoulder a plaid travel coat, under his right arm Hugo’s
“Les Miserables,” his favorite book, and in his right hand a
dagger)

DOTTORE Where to, Scaramouche; where are you going?

SCARAMOUCHE Can't you see? To the bathroom. (he turns) I've forgotten my diary. (he suddenly darts to the exit where he bumps into GILLES) Gilles, take over my part! (he runs off)

(GILLES steps forward)

SCENE 12

(GILLES, TRIVALIN, BRIGHELLA; in the back, DOTTORE and ZERBINE. Later SCARAMOUCHE returns)

GILLES Trivalin, you're still here? Release that girl and go and hide yourself.

TRIVALIN (holding ISABELLA tightly) You mean that, Gilles? Why should I hide myself in shame? I'm not a thief, like some, but I do call it theft to slyly grab and carry off a woman and thus abuse her inexperience, instead of honest competition among men. You should be ashamed, Gilles!

BRIGHELLA Tell me, Peppe,
is the carriage ready?

GILLES

Let her go!

Or did you buy her? And aren't you ashamed
of purchasing what other men would conquer
with their hearts? If you're some sort of tradesman,
what are you doing here? Get down below
and join the audience. This is a place
for actors; a stage for the performance
of gallant deeds and tragic flights of soul;
and on it, do you dare to say, in public,
how much you paid in cash, how big your discount
in this sordid deal?

TRIVALIN

(lets ISABELLA go and throws at GILLE's feet his purse,
which, from its sound, is obviously empty)

Here, take it all!

And buy those things you love, your silken hose,
your rosy powders, nauseating scents,
your creams, your dainty soaps, your "specialities,"
your Spanish fly; get all you need to charm
your prostitutes — that's what your women are,
and you're a common whore. Well, not Trivalin!
He needn't buy such things in hopes of love.
Love is his for what he is and who:
not a pimp like you!

GILLES

A pimp?

TRIVALIN

Just go,
go over with those women in the stalls,
and rub against their legs and wind around
their skirts, and speak, and sniff, and fascinate;
go on, fawn over them! Those women there,
and all the ones you merely see in passing,
catch sight of only once, and even those
you'll never see, you love them all; you yield
to all the women in the world, including
those so chaste and innocent that men
avert their eyes, embarrassed by their own
experience — you yield to all of them!
Take your greedy appetites and go,
get off the stage! But tell yourself, below,
that up above you stands a man of strength:
Trivalin!

GILLES

Then you'd better join the circus.
I'm sure they're waiting for you: join the circus!
Put your strength to use, raise iron weights,
because you know you can't arouse a woman!

TRIVALIN

And you're a juggler, with your glib words, speeches,
lies; yes, you could elevate a woman
— with hot air. You're contemptible, for lies
spew from your mouth like multicolored insects:

they dart about and dazzle all the women
and creep inside their ears and sweetly buzz;
and a woman, lulled by what she thinks are words,
listens in a daze and is corrupted.
Let others lie and versify and grovel
and stink of scent — I am a man of honor.

BRIGHELLA The classic type of man, my lords: Trivalin.

GILLES To adorn the truth with poetry, to worship,
that's all beyond your grasp. Your brain gyrates
like some imbecilic wheel around one center,
one hub: the verb "to have." To have, to own,
and not to understand, to honor something
finer than yourself; no, just to have,
to be the sole possessor, to hold something
in your hands while saying "this is mine,"
reducing everything to property;
to clutch a woman as I clutch this glass
is terrible! (throws his mirror to the floor)
What stupidity! To say you "own a woman,"
to add up all her charms and say they're "yours."
What's yours, you idiot? Why, nothing! Nothing!
Not her image in the mirror, not her fragrance,
not her movements nor her gestures, not her dreams,
not the secrets of her heart. To "own" a woman!
Buy her; buy her twice! She's no more yours

to act in the next scene.

ZERBINE They'll fight! Do you think they'll fight?

SCENE 13

(GILLES, TRIVALIN, BRIGHELLA, ISABELLA.
BRIGHELLA brings ISABELLA forward)

TRIVALIN Gilles!

BRIGHELLA Stop quarreling, gentlemen, it's futile. (lifts ISABELLA's skirt) Better look and see, Mr. Gilles, what delightful legs Isabella has. Have you ever seen such tiny feet?

ISABELLA (bowing) Oh, Mr. Gilles!

GILLES Oh, Isabella!

TRIVALIN (wildly) Zane, take Isabella away!

BRIGHELLA (turns ISABELLA towards TRIVALIN and lifts her skirt a little higher) Look, my dear Trivalin, what charm, what gracefulness!

ISABELLA (bowing) Oh, Mr. Trivalin!

TRIVALIN (bowing) Thank you, Isabella!

GILLES (shouts) Brighella, let her go!

BRIGHELLA (turns ISABELLA to the front and lifts her skirts still higher) Do you both see well, gentlemen? Look at the fullness, the firmness, the faultless line! (lets her skirt fall) My dear Isabella (bows to her), this is the end of your part.

(ISABELLA bows to the audience and steps back)

SCENE 14

TRIVALIN (suffering) How long will your white mask haunt me? Get out of my sight, clown! My heart tells me to kill you.

GILLES You will kill me because you are afraid, because you know that Isabella can be conquered only by spirit. Isabella longs for the sound of a lute, for a virtuoso playing on her feelings, for an inspired lover. Don't you know that a woman yearns for a poet?

TRIVALIN A woman is unstable, and sweet, clever lies can sway her; but believe me, Gilles, Isabella loves a hero. Isabella loves deeds, courage, violence, and blood on a man's hands. Remember, Gilles, a woman wants to be

the spoils.

GILLES But you are buying her! Can there be a greater disgrace than this? For shame, Trivalin! (spits at TRIVALIN's feet) Is this how a hero acts?

TRIVALIN (spits at GILLE's feet) And should poets be thieves? What could be more vile than to snatch a woman by deceit, like a thief? Get away from here, you coward! Go on, it's night, your moon is shining, go steal chickens, you ferret! You sneak! Get out of here, now! Aren't I Trivalin?

GILLES You are not Trivalin: your name is Capitan and Stantoretto, you are called Pascogliese and Giangurgolo; They give you a different name in different parts of the world, but everybody knows what you are: a cheat, a coward, a swindler, a drunken tough who brags about his great feats and is kicked out of taverns. You have no strength! You're bloated from drinking, and your arms are nothing but greasy pulp.

TRIVALIN And you are Marco Pepe, the buffoon: you faint and fall and are sick inside your head; you steal verses and chickens and every word you say is a lie. Wash the powder from your face and let everyone see what a faded beauty you are, you whore! Zerbine, where is Isabella? You wilted blossom,

you fish-eyed fool! Zerbine, bring Isabella here!

GILLES Isabella!

TRIVALIN Isabella will be mine!

GILLES Trivalin, at the price of my talent, my lute, my heart
(shouts) — she will be mine!

BRIGHELLA Gentlemen, take my advice! As neither of you will give
way, then share Isabella, half and half.

TRIVALIN You scoundrel! (throws his glove at BRIGHELLA;
BRIGHELLA turns aside and the glove hits GILLES)

GILLES (bravely) I accept, Trivalin!

BRIGHELLA (sneaking aside) What, a duel?

TRIVALIN All right, a duel! Bring weapons, pistols, anything! (to
the audience) I will settle my differences with Gilles
in front of all of you, with arms.

GILLES I shall fight with Trivalin before your very eyes.

DOTTORE For God's sake Gilles, don't do it, you are too weak;
anyway, as a poet, you are not bound by honor, you can

refuse.

GILLES (hurt) Why do you all tell me that I am incapable of deeds? Give me a weapon, I shall win!

DOTTORE Trivalin, in the name of God, then you give way; nothing must happen to Gilles here. (takes TRIVALIN aside) Look, it wouldn't be proper for you to fight with Gilles. After all, he's never been a soldier.

TRIVALIN (turns his back on him) Isabella will be mine!

SCARAMOUCHE Gilles, don't fight. Why, you don't even know how to shoot!

GILLES My dear Scaramouche, love and Isabella will guide my hand.

DOTTORE Don't do it, Gilles: dueling doesn't suit you at all. You are a lyrical character, you should write poetry, be sad and suffer; but to die here is not in your part at all.

GILLES Dottore, I should like to die for Isabella. I could never die more beautifully than like this, mourned by my sweetheart. Never, Dottore!

DOTTORE (wringing his hands) Woe, oh woe, how fateful is love!

BRIGHELLA — and fatal, too.

TRIVALIN (lifting his arm) Scaramouche, the pistols!

(SCARAMOUCHE goes slowly to fetch the pistols)

SCENE 15

(GILLES, TRIVALIN, BRIGHELLA, DOTTORE)

DOTTORE Woe and alas! Gilles, you still have time to give way and make peace with Trivalin.

BRIGHELLA (gloomily) It had to be. Act now, Gilles.

GILLES (absolutely decided) I shall fight. Perhaps I shall die today and never again stand here like this, but (he bows his head) I will fight.

My lords, my name is Gilles, called Grazioso and Peppe Nappa, too; and I was born one night when Moon, the paramour, crossed paths with shining Venus. I am a silver lute, le pâle amant de la lune; I play in verse; my age is six and twenty, and wherever I have played I have been well received, for which I thank you. I am Gilles, my lords, and thus you know me. Should I die today

before your eyes, and never play again
nor move your hearts, then let love sanctify
my tragic memory is your fond remembrance.

TRIVALIN

And I, my ladies, I am named Trivalin.
The daylight saw my birth, my age is thirty;
Throughout my youth I trained to make my body
straight and strong, and so you see me here.
I play the epic parts, I play the hero
— you be the judge of my success; but if
the hand of God decrees my death today,
my lords and ladies, all I ask of you
is to remember that a man of strength,
Trivalin, met his death, Trivalin perished.

GILLES

(sighs, wrings his hands and quietly recites)
My lords, my name is Gilles, called Graziso
and Peppe Nappa, too; and I was born
one night when Moon the paramour crossed paths
with shining Venus — (he continues in a whisper;
meanwhile —)

BRIGHELLA

And I— Brighella; and Fichetto, too,
And Finochetto, also known as Zane.
My specialty — intrigue; I beg your pardon,
but evil can be useful on the stage

and useful even more in daily life,
among you and, my dears, between you, too.
Therefore you know me well: I'm just like you;
My specialty — intrigue; my name, Brighella.

(He bows and steps back)

SCENE 16

(ALL as before, plus SCARAMOUCHE)

(SCARAMOUCHE brings the pistols. DOTTORE examines and loads them. SCARAMOUCHE measures the distance of twelve steps twice and marks the positions with chalk; silence. DOTTORE hands one pistol to TRIVALIN and the other to GILLES)

SCARAMOUCHE Take your places now, facing in opposite directions; and when I say “three,” turn quickly and shoot, both at the same time. Remember, both at the same time.

TRIVALIN Let's get on with it.
(they take their positions with their backs to each other)

SCARAMOUCHE God be with you, Gilles! (he trembles) One —

GILLES Wait, Scaramouche! Where's Isabella?

SCARAMOUCHE She's in back. She's watching you.

GILLES If I die, dear Scaramouche, tell Isabella that I have loved her. Tell her that she will find no greater love than the love of the one who died for her.

SCARAMOUCHE (moved) I'll tell her, Gilles.

GILLES I have not told her yet that I love her. Tell her that, but only after my death, Scaramouche; and tell her that I died for her and that my last words, my last thoughts, were for her; tell her that I died with her name on my lips.

SCARAMOUCHE You can rely on me, Gilles.

TRIVALIN Let's go!

GILLES Last night I had a dream,
as fleeting as a girl's sweet breath in sleep;
I dreamt of Isabella, that I died
for her and that her crystal tears cascaded
painfully into my open wounds;
and then, with arms outspread, I called her name,
I cried out: I am not yet dead, not yet

because you love me!

SCARAMOUCHE (sighs)

GILLES Are you still here, Scaramouche? Better to tell
Isabella now. Tell her that I die for her.

SCARAMOUCHE I think I'd rather tell her afterwards.

GILLES (sighing) Very well, then, afterwards. Dottore, if I die,
open my little mother-of-pearl box, the one I always
carry with me; I have some manuscripts in it. Have
them printed on smooth vellum and bound in rose-
colored satin, and with my portrait inside, the one by
Watteau. Don't forget the portrait.

DOTTORE (moved) Of course, my dear Gilles, don't worry.

TRIVALIN Come on!

GILLES Yes, right away. — And edged with gilt, Dottore!
Don't forget the gilt edging.

DOTTORE No, Gilles, I won't forget.

GILLES What else did I want to say? Scaramouche, wouldn't
you like to have my clothes? I think you'd look nice

in them.

SCARAMOUCHE Thank you, my good Gilles. I shall wear them.

GILLES On the stage?

SCARAMOUCHE On the stage, Gilles.

GILLES (turns) I would like to play my violin for the last time.

TRIVALIN Stay where you are!

GILLES (turns back obediently) Couldn't I say goodbye to Isabella?

DOTTORE I don't think so, Gilles; spare her tender feelings.

TRIVALIN Let's go!

SCENE 17

(Those from the previous scene and ZERBINE; later, BRIGHELLA)

ZERBINE (enters from the wings) Listen, young men, you can't just kill each other like this. Mr. Gilles owes me money, and how am I going to get it if he's killed?

I'm not going to let you kill Mr. Gilles.

GILLES (feebly) There you are, I can't fight.

TRIVALIN (shouts) Go away, Zerbine, or I'll shoot you!

ZERBINE Holy Saint Mary! You thieving scoundrels, you want to rob a poor old woman!

GILLES Zerbine, I'll give you the money within three days.

ZERBINE Three days after your death? Mr. Trivalin, I am not going to have Mr. Gilles killed. I don't think you'd pay off his debts.

BRIGHELLA (standing in the wings) Zerbine, Gilles could assign you the publishing rights for his manuscripts, his poems.

ZERBINE (suspiciously) Do you think I could get anything for them?

BRIGHELLA Have them published on cheap paper in a popular edition. Only paperbacks sell these days. Besides, Gilles could leave you all his personal belongings.

ZERBINE Well, Isabella could alter his silk underwear for her dowry, but what do I do with the rest?

BRIGHELLA Sell it; what else? I myself would buy a few antiques and knickknacks, things like that. I want to set myself up.

ZERBINE No, there wouldn't be enough. I want my money and I'm going to bring charges against him.

GILLES My God, what am I to do?

SCARAMOUCHE (in a sudden fit of self-sacrifice) I haven't got much, but what I have is as much Gilles's as mine. I'll be responsible for his debts.

DOTTORE (full of magnanimity) No, Zerbine. I will cover his debts!

GILLES Oh, no, I can't accept that!

ZERBINE But I can, young man! You've got nothing to say about it. (slowly goes upstage) If the floor's going to be all covered with blood, you'll have to get somebody else to clean it, I'm too old for a job like that; blood stains a floor something terrible. The best thing to do is put a handful of salt on the blood first, and then scrub it with a lot of hot water. In the old days I used to clean bloody floors all the time, but now I'm too old for it. (sits down on a stool) Well, is it going to begin?

BRIGHELLA (from the wings) Zerbine, come here!

SCENE 18

(Those from the previous scene minus Zerbine and Brighella)

SCARAMOUCHE Should I start counting, Gilles?

GILLES Not just yet, Scaramouche. I would like a drink of water. Give me some water with a little sugar in it.

TRIVALIN That's enough! Scaramouche, start counting!

TRIVALIN Yes, yes; only a minute. What is it I still want to say, Scaramouche? Dottore, what is it I still wanted to say?

SCARAMOUCHE One!

GILLES No, wait a minute. May I say a few words to the audience?

SCARAMOUCHE Two!

GILLES No, not yet! How strange life is! Oh, Scaramouche —

SCARAMOUCHE Three!

(TRIVALIN quickly turns and fires; GILLES has forgotten to turn and is hit in the back; he falls backwards into the arms of DOTTORE)

SCENE 19

DOTTORE Help me! Gilles is wounded! (lays GILLES slowly on the floor)

SCARAMOUCHE (kneels down and raises GILLES slightly) Dottore, what's the matter with him? Help him, for God's sake!

DOTTORE (examines the wound) Oh, my God! Merciful God! (he listens to GILLES's heart)

BRIGHLLA (pokes his head out of the wings; he has on a traveling cap) Did something happen?

DOTTORE (kneeling by GILLES and listening to his heart) Gilles is dying.
(BRIGHLLA disappears)

TRIVALIN (with his back to GILLES, covering his face)
Surely I was right in what I did;
could anybody say that I was not?
One life, so brittle, how could he have lived?

The poor, unstable soul, he never knew
a moment free from suffering!

GILLES Turn out the lights; why are you putting lights
above my head?

DOTTORE Gilles, is there anything you would like?

GILLES I'd like to lie down at home. May I make my bow
to the audience?

DOTTORE No, dear Gilles, it would be better not to; just lie still.

GILLES Very well, I will lie very quietly. Why did he shoot me
in the back?

SCARAMOUCHE Because you didn't turn around.

GILLES I see; Scaramouche, Isabella's handkerchief is inside
my shirt. Give it to me. (SCARAMOUCHE does so;
GILLES is perturbed) Why is it so bloody? I've been
Shot in the back, not the chest!

DOTTORE Don't talk so much, Gilles, you'll tire yourself.

GILLES No, Isabella, not a handkerchief—
but a vast and lovely garden, full of roses;

some are red, some white, but mostly red;
Gilles walks amongst them with your handkerchief;
not handkerchief — a woman, all in white,
who thinks of love — but there are many women —
so many — do you think they could be angels?
Gilles walks amongst them, counts them one by one,
three hundred, no — eight hundred, now —
and many more — —

ZERBINE (standing over him) Merciful God, how handsome he is,
the poor young master! No girl could help but love him.
Why should he die so young? I could have told him
which girls like him.

TRIVALIN (staring into the audience) No one can say that I was
wrong to kill him. It had to be. Why did he get in my
way? Why did he want Isabella? Isabella belongs to
me!

ZERBINE (approaches him) Mr. Trivalin, Brighella handed over
to me that IOU you signed this evening with Dottore and
Scaramouche. I'm presenting it.

TRIVALIN Leave me alone. Why, Brighella hasn't paid me a penny
for it.

ZERBINE That's not my business, and anyway, you can't prove it.
Mr. Brighella also took all your suitcases and your
clothes with him.

TRIVALIN What suitcases? Where's Brighella?

DOTTORE Be quiet. Gilles is dying.

GILLES My lords, my name is Gilles, called Grazioso,
and Peppe Nappa, too — —

How does it go?

SCARAMOUCHE (quietly) — — and I was born
one night when Moon, the paramour, crossed paths
with shining Venus. I am a silver lute,
le pâle amant de la lune; I play in verse — —

TRIVALIN It had to happen. Isabella couldn't possibly be his,
could she? She had to be mine, didn't she? It was fate.
(he straightens up) Didn't I have a right to kill him?
Doesn't Isabella belong to me now, by right? I won.
Where is Isabella?

SCARAMOUCHE Gilles is dead.

DOTTORE (stands and raises his arms) Moon, your lover has died!

TRIVALIN (lifts his head and sighs with relief) Where is Isabella? Zerbine, bring Isabella here!

ZERBINE (bows) Mr. Trivalin, a carriage was waiting. Mr. Brighella said goodbye to me — oh, Mr. Brighella is a regular cavalier!

TRIVALIN Where is Isabella?

ZERBINE Gone. Am I her aunt, supposed to keep an eye on her every minute? She left with Mr. Brighella.

CURTAIN