

A DRAMATIC VERSION OF

R. L. STEVENSON'S STORY

THE SIRE DE MALETROIT'S DOOR

(Written in collaboration with GERALD KELLY)

SCENE I.

*The SIRE DE MALETROIT sitting before the fire. A chime of bells — eleven.*

ALAIN.

'Leven 'o the clock! Plague take these lovers! What? do they make a Maletroit wait? [*Picks up letter from table — reads*] “Mademoiselle” — um, um, — “my words might show that love which I cannot declare in writing” — very likely — “nor raise a blush on that alabaster brow” — um! um! ah! — “embrace of the eyes” — is the fellow an octopus? — “Tho' you do not respond to my letters” — ah! — “yet I would not have you leave me” — I daresay not — “Pity me, moon-like queen” — moonlike? um! — “Leave the postern door ajar” — well, it is ajar — “that I may speak with your beauty on the stairs” — um — can't meet him there. Cold! cold! [*Sniffs.*] A pretty letter. [*Throws it aside.*] Andrew! some more logs. [*Enter ANDREW.*] I expect company. [*Chuckles long.*] The old Burgundy, Andrew. [*Exit ANDREW.*] I propose to squeeze Duke Charles' grapes, though fate and my age forbid me a smack at his forces — “neu sinas Medos equitare inultos” — but our good King is no Augustus.

[*Strikes gong. Enter PRIEST quietly and quickly.*  
ALAIN does not turn round.

Good evening, father. All is ready?

PRIEST.

All, my lord.

ALAIN.

It is near the time. She has remained in her room?

PRIEST.

All the day.

ALAIN.

Has she attempted no message? eh?

PRIEST.

Sir, she —

ALAIN.

[*Interrupts.*] She has not succeeded, at least?

PRIEST.

I am still Father Jerome.

[*Pause.*

ALAIN.

She is ready dressed as I ordered? And now praying in the Chapel?

[*ALAIN gets up and can now see* PRIEST.

PRIEST.

As you ordered, my lord.

ALAIN.

Content?

[*PRIEST puts out his hands with the gesture hardly.*

PRIEST.

Young maids are wilful, my lord.

ALAIN.

Let her be resigned to the will of Heaven.

[*The PRIEST smiles subtly. ALAIN perceives it.*]  
And “my” will.

[*Strikes gong twice.*]

You may retire, father.

[*PRIEST bows and retires. Enter CAPTAIN and stands at salute.*]

Ah, Captain, you have your fifty men in readiness?

CAPTAIN.

Yes, my lord. [*Salutes.*]

ALAIN.

Let them be drawn up behind yon door. When I clap my hands you will raise the arras, but let no man move. And let 'em be silent — the man I hear I hang. [*CAPTAIN salutes.*] You may go. [*CAPTAIN salutes, and exits. ALAIN reaches to a tome on the table.*] Now, Flaccus, let us spend this night together as we have spent so many. The crisis of my life — my brother's trust, God rest his soul! [*crosses himself and mutters silently in prayer*] — shall not find Alain de Maletroit unready or disturbed.

SCENE CLOSES

## SCENE II.

*A narrow dirty street in Paris, fifteenth century.  
Night pitch black. Passers-by with lanterns.*

FIRST PASSER-BY *stumbles into* SECOND.

SECOND PASSER-BY.

Zounds, man! have a care with thy goings.

FIRST PASSER-BY.

Stand, or I strike. Who but a thief goes lanternless o' nights?

SECOND PASSER-BY.

The saints be praised, 'tis my good gossip Peter Halse. What, knowest thou not thy old friend?

[FIRST PASSER-BY *lifts his lantern to the other's face.*

FIRST PASSER-BY.

Martin Cloche, by the Mass!

SECOND PASSER-BY.

Ay, Martin Cloche! And his lantern hath gone out, and his heart faileth him somewhat. But these be troublous times.

[*Enter FLORIMOND and waits.*

FIRST PASSER-BY.

The town is full of these drunken English men-at-arms.

SECOND PASSER-BY.

The English be bad, but God save us from the Burgundians! Their own cousin-germans be we, and for that they are but bitterer.

FLORIMOND.

Devil take them! What, will they stand here gossiping all night?

FIRST PASSER-BY.

'Tis a cold night: I would be home.

SECOND PASSER-BY.

Light me, prithee, to my door: it lieth as thou knowest, but a stone's-throw from St. Yniold's.

FIRST PASSER-BY.

Well, let us be going.

[*Exeunt.*

FLORIMOND.

Now for the moment I have longed for this three months! Blanche! Blanche! I shall see thee, touch thee — who knows what maiden love may work on maiden modesty? Ah, fall deeper, ye blessed shadows! Ye are light enough for Florimond de Champdivers to move toward his bliss!

[*Noise of clashing armour, ribald laughter, &c. Enter the Watch, R., drunk.*

A WATCHMAN.

Ho, boys! a gay night for thieves.

FLORIMOND.

Curse the sots!

[*Crouches back in the shadow.*

SECOND WATCHMAN.

[Sings]

The soldier's life is short and merry,  
His mistress' lips are ripe as a cherry,  
Then drink, drink!  
The guns roar out and the swords flash clean,  
And the soldier sleepeth under the green,  
Oh, the soldier's life for me!

But a scurvy night it is, comrades, when the streets are slippery, and the wine cold in a man's belly, and never a little white rabbit of a woman scuttling along in the dark.

THIRD WATCHMAN.

What ho! my lads! Here's a scurvy Frenchman skulking along. What, will you make your lass attend you, master?

FLORIMOND.

Loose me, knave, I am for England, and a Captain in your army, or rather that of Burgundy — if you will be precise.

FIRST WATCHMAN.

What do you here, without a lantern, scaring honest folk?

FLORIMOND.

Honesty is no word for to-night. Will you the loyal man's word?

SECOND WATCHMAN.

That's it, my gallant cock! The word!

FLORIMOND.

Burgundy and freedom.

THIRD WATCHMAN.

So! Give a crown to the poor watchmen then to drink your Excellency's health, and luck to your honour's love. Ah! we're gay when we're young — I've a sweetheart myself.

FLORIMOND.

And now be off!

[Gives money. Exeunt.]

Cold! — the devil! Ah! but to-night — at last I shall touch my Blanche. May Blanche warm me well with a hearty kiss! The little white cat! Three months! And I've not so much as exchanged a word. There must be an end to all that. Faith, but she makes me think of Biondetta, that I knew in the Italian campaign. O my Blanche! One moment, and I am in thine arms! Blanche! Sweet, sweet Blanche. O little white-faced rose of France. A soldier's heart is thine — a soldier's arms shall be round thee in a moment! 'Tis a fine thing this love — the strong true abiding love of a brave man. How like little Florise her voice is when she sings!

[By this fool's talk he loses his opportunity  
Enter DENYS.]

DENYS.

Cold is my word for it. [*Shudders.*] Where the devil have I got to now? Had I but vowed St. Denys a candle and put the same in my pocket, I would not now be in the dark. Here was a lane, and the folk had called it Wolf's Throat, and now here's a door and devil a name to it. Fool I was to stay winebibbing with Cousin Henri, and triple knave he to send me forth without a boy and a light. True! he was under the table — and seven times fool was I not to join him there.

FLORIMOND.

O this miserable sot!

*[Crouches again, DENYS sees him.]*

DENYS.

O thank God! Here's another poor devil, a gentleman by his clothes, and a thief by his manner, and I daresay a good fellow. *[Goes to FLORIMOND and slaps him on the back.]* Sir, do you know this cursed Paris? My inn, which I have lost, is the Sign of the Green Grass — I should say the Field o' Spring — and 'tis hard by the Church of St. Anselm, that is hard by the river, and the hardest of all is that neither church, inn, nor river can I find this devil of a night.

*[Catches FLORIMOND and shakes him by the shoulder.]*

FLORIMOND.

Know you are speaking to a captain in the army of Duke Charles! Moderate thy drunkenness, man, or I will call the watch.

DENYS.

Know me for a captain in the army of His Majesty King Charles of France, whom God preserve!

FLORIMOND.

What, traitor?

DENYS.

Traitor in thy teeth! I have a safe-conduct from your pinchbeck duke. Oh, the devil! 'twill serve me but ill these Paris nights — a fool am I! Well, sir, I ask your pardon, and throw myself on your kindness.



FLORIMOND.

Ha! St. Gris! Then I have you, my fine cock.  
Watch, ho! A traitor! I will pay you your insolence.

[Calls.

DENYS.

Oh then, to shut your mouth. [*Draws.*

[FLORIMOND *tries to draw, gets the flat of DENYS' sword on his shoulder, and runs away. Exit DENYS pursuing and FLORIMOND calling out. Distant shouts. Re-enter DENYS, L.*

DENYS.

Oh, my inn! my inn! What a fool am I! Where can I hide? The air is full of noises. I would change my safe-conduct for a pair of wings. I must steal back the way I came, and St. Denys lend me prudence the next fool I meet. What a night! O my God!

[Enter WATCH, R., *running and shouting.*

Well, for France, then! My back to the door, and my sword to the foeman's breast! [*Puts his back to the door.*] My father's son could never have died otherwise! [Enter WATCH.] St. Denys for Beaulieu! The door's open. May the luck turn yet!

[*Slides backwards gently through door. WATCH cross stage stumbling, cursing, and crying, "A traitor, a traitor!"*

[*Stage being clear for a little, suddenly the door bangs violently.*

DENYS.

[*Inside.*] What the devil was that? The door!

[*Re-enter* FLORIMOND, *R.*

FLORIMOND.

At last! [*Goes to door and pushes it.*] The devil take all women! After all, the door is shut. Laugh, thou light little fool, laugh now. One day thou shalt moan upon the stones, and Florimond de Champdivers shall shut his door to thee. Damn and damn and damn! What served love shall serve hate: 'tis a poor game that only works one way.

[*Curtain.*

### SCENE III.

*The SIRE DE MALETROIT as in Scene I. He is standing alert and intent, listening. From below are growls and muttered curses; then a sharp sound like the snapping of a sword.*

ALAIN.

“Amat janua limen!” [*Closes book.*] Now, my friend, whoever you are — for your charming letter does not mention your honourable name — we shall very soon have the pleasure of seeing you. “Embrace of the eyes,” eh? You distrust my door, already, eh? Why do you knock so? [*Great noise below.*] No honest craftsman ever built a door — you waste time! Why so reluctant to move from the cold night to the “blush of an alabaster brow,” and the rest of your accursed troubabour’s jargon, to a bliss you little expect. “Gratia cum Nymphis geminisque sororibus audet ducere nuda choros.” But your “choros,” Blanche, is but your old uncle, who perhaps loves you better than you think just now.

[*A sound of suppressed sobbing from the Chapel.*]

Ah! you may weep if you will — but what choice have you left me? And Lord! Lord! what could a loving heart ask more? [*Stumbling on steps, and a muttering, “Perdition catch the fool who invented these circular stairs.”*] Ha! He seems a little uncertain of the stair. Hush!

[*Enter DENYS, who remains behind arras. ALAIN sits.*]

DENYS.

[*Stumbles and swears.*] O these stairs! They go round and round, or “seem” to go round — faith! I have seen an entire castle do as much — and lead nowhere. [*Pushes against arras and is seen by audience. He hastily withdraws.*] Oh, they do though! Shall I knock? Shall I go in? Shall I stay here till morning? There are three fools there, and I have a poor choice: to knock is polite, to wait is polite, and to introduce my charming self is the politest of all. [*Peeps in.*] Can’t see anybody! It’s clearly a gentleman’s house — and a fool he is to leave his postern door ajar. Whoever he is, he can hardly blame me for a misadventure — and a curious tale is a passport the world over. Well, let me go in! To go in boldly is to slap Luck the courtesan on the shoulder, and ’tis Venus o’ the dice-box to an ace and a deuce but she call me a tall fellow of my hands and bid me sit to supper. Warily now! . . .

[*Pushes past arras.*]

ALAIN.

Good evening, good evening, my dear young friend. Welcome, very welcome! Come to the fire, man, and warm yourself. “*Jam satis terris nivis,*” — if you know your Horace as you know your Ovid, we shall get along splendidly.

[*DENYS stands stupefied. ALAIN waits.*]

DENYS.

I fear, sir, I don’t know my Ovid. [*With the air of one primed to repeat a lesson.*] I beg a thousand pardons, Monsieur.

ALAIN.

Don't apologise, don't apologise. I've been expecting you all the evening.

DENYS.

Excuse me, sir, there is some mistake — !

ALAIN.

No! No! There is no mistake. Be at ease, my young friend.

DENYS.

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] But I had no wish to be here — er — er! — Nothing was further from my thoughts than this most unwarrantable intrusion.

ALAIN.

Well, well, that's all right. Here you are, which is the great thing after all, isn't it? Sit down, my dear young friend [DENYS *uncomfortably and slowly takes a chair*], and we shall — er — arrange our little affair. You arrive uninvited, but believe me, most welcome.

DENYS.

Sir, you persist in error. I am a stranger: Denys de Beaulieu is my name, and I am here under a safe-conduct. That you see me in your house is only owing to — your door.

ALAIN.

Ah! my door — a hospitable fancy of mine!

DENYS.

I don't understand. I did not wish . . . oh!

ALAIN.

My dear sir, we old gentlemen expect this reluctance from young bloods. [*With bitter irony.*]

We bear it. But [*flaming out*] if the matter touches one's honour — [*rises and looks sternly at DENYS*].

DENYS.

Your "honour?"

[DENYS *is amazed out of all measure.*

ALAIN.

We try to find some means of overcoming such modesty.

DENYS.

Is this Ovid or Horace?

ALAIN.

To business, then, if you will affect ignorance. [*Strikes gong; enter PRIEST, who gives DENYS a long keen glance and speaks in an undertone to ALAIN.*] Is she in a better frame of mind?

PRIEST.

She is more resigned, my lord.

ALAIN.

Now a murrain o' these languishing wenches in their green-sickness! By 'r Lady, she is hard to please. A likely stripling, not ill-born, and the one of her own choosing. Why, what more would she have?

PRIEST.

The situation is not usual to a young damsel, and somewhat trying to her blushes.

ALAIN.

She should have thought of that before. This devil's dance is not to my piping, but since she is in it, by 'r Lady, she shall carry it through.

[*Motions* PRIEST *to retire. Exit* PRIEST, *with a low reverence to ALAIN and a courteous bow to DENYS.*

DENYS.

[*Rises and clears his throat.*] Sir, let me — explain that —

ALAIN.

Don't explain. May I beg you to be seated, my "dear" young friend. We've been expecting you all night: the lady is ready, though I believe a little tearful: a bride has so much to fear, you know — "et corde et genibus tremit" — eh, my Gaetulian lion?

DENYS.

[*Raises his hand authoritatively to check speech.*] Sir! this misunderstanding, for such I am convinced it is, must go no further. I am a stranger here —

ALAIN.

Well, well, you'll get to know the old place in time. Blanche —

DENYS.

Sir! pray let me speak. I know you not —

ALAIN.

"We" know "you."

DENYS.

[*Ironically.*] I am too honoured.

ALAIN.

Well?

DENYS.

You speak of a lady to me. You mistake me

ALAIN.

I hope so.

DENYS.

Do not entrust a stranger with your family secrets, is my advice — as a man of the world.

ALAIN.

But my nephew! —

DENYS.

I do not even know your lordship's honourable nephew.

ALAIN.

I may yet show you a sneaking rascal in his person.

DENYS.

This really cannot go on. I must beg you, sir, to allow me to go from your house. I came here by an ill chance enough — though it saved my life in sooth.

ALAIN.

And secured you a splendid marriage.

DENYS.

[*Aside.*] Never, never again will I mix my drinks. [ALAIN surveys DENYS from head to foot, emitting satisfied chuckles at irregular intervals, while DENYS clears throat repeatedly. This continues long, DENYS fidgeting more and more. DENYS, *politely*.] The wind has gone down somewhat.



[ALAIN falls into a fit of silent laughter. DENYS rises and puts on his hat with a flourish.

DENYS.

Sir, if you are in your wits, I find you insolent: if not, I will not stand here parleying with a madman.

ALAIN.

I must apologise, no doubt, but the circumstances are peculiar. Is it your custom to steal into the houses of gentlemen after midnight, and accuse the owners of lunacy? *Chuckles.*] Well — let us be polite if we cannot be friendly.

DENYS.

Then, sir, you will permit me to explain my intrusion.

ALAIN.

[*Laughing.*] Ha! Ha! a fine story, I wager. 'Twill interest me much, i' faith. [DENYS shows signs of impatience; ALAIN begins to look a little doubtful. With sudden interest:] Well, how "did" you come here?

DENYS.

[*With much quaint lively gesture — his story-telling powers are much in request by his mess, and he is very proud of them.*] Aye, sir! by 'r Lady, when I think of it, 'tis a curious adventure enough. [*Pause to collect thoughts. Then dashes off lively.*] Lost my way in this cursed town — night like hell's mouth — groped about your dirty little black narrow streets — no lantern — quarrelled with an officer — I draw — captain bolts — up run guard — see open door — your door, sir! — in I go! and then all of a sudden bangs to the door and I am

caught like a rat in a trap. I break my sword on the old beast — give it up — up come stairs — ah! stair come up — I mean “I come” — a murrain on these courtly phrases! and here I stand [*rises and bows*], Denys de Beaulieu, Damoiseau de Beaulieu, in the Province of Normandy, at your lordship’s service.

ALAIN.

That is your way of looking after the lady’s reputation. Hear mine! Allow me first to introduce myself as Alain de Maletroit, Sire de Maletroit, and Warden of the Marches under his Majesty King Charles —

DENYS.

Whom God preserve!

[*Waves his broken sword.*]

ALAIN.

What excellent sentiments, and what an unfortunate omen — dear, dear me! And I have the honour to offer you the hand — I presume you already possess the heart — of the Lady Blanche de Maletroit.

DENYS.

You — what?

ALAIN.

Tut! Tut! The marriage, if you please, will take place in an hour.

DENYS.

[*Aside.*] Oh, he is mad after all! [*Aloud.*] What nightmare is this?

ALAIN.

You are not very polite to the lady — not as polite as your letter.

DENYS.

My letter?

[ALAIN *takes up letter from table and reads.*

ALAIN (*reads*).

“O white-bosomed Blanche! I am pale and wan with suffering for thy love. Pity me, moonlike queen. Leave to-night the postern door” — my postern door — “ajar that I may speak with your beauty on the stairs” — my stairs. “Beware of thy lynx-eyed uncle” — me — ah! yes?

DENYS.

Sir, do you take me for the pernicious idiot that wrote that stuff?

ALAIN.

Sir, I know that there is a lady and a letter and a door and — a marriage.

[*Indicating the appropriate four quarters of the universe.*

DENYS.

And a sword. If it “be” broken —

ALAIN.

“Integer vitae scel” —

DENYS.

I know “that” tag at least.

[ALAIN claps his hands, walks toward door behind DENYS. The arras swings back and armed men appear.

ALAIN.

“O maior tandem parcas, insane, minori.”

DENYS.

A truce to all this theatrical folly, Monsieur de Maletroit. Let me do you the honour to take your words seriously. I decline this marriage. I demand free passage from your house.

ALAIN.

I regret infinitely that I cannot comply with Monsieur's most moderate demands — at least [*quickly*] in the sense he means.

DENYS.

I am a prisoner then?

ALAIN.

I state the facts, and leave the inference to Monsieur's indulgence. But before you altogether decline this marriage, it would be perhaps properer did I present you to the lady.

DENYS.

[*Sees that he must humour his strange host; rises and bows in acquiescence with inane smile and phrase.*] Ah, Monsieur, you make me too happy!

[*This speech is not ironical but conventional and absurd. ALAIN strikes the gong. Enter PRIEST and bows.*

ALAIN.

Require the presence of the Lady Blanche de Maletroit, if you please, father.

PRIEST [*bows*].

My Lord.

[*Retires. Enter BLANCHE in a bridal dress, very shy and ashamed, with downcast eyes.*

DENYS.

[*Aside.*] Ah! but she is beautiful!

ALAIN.

Mademoiselle de Maletroit, allow me to present you to the Damoiseau Denys de Beaulieu. Monsieur Denys, my niece. [BLANCHE *hears the strange name and is shocked, looks up and only sees the back of DENYS' head, so low is he bowing. She understands that he has given another name and regains her self-possession.*] Forgive the formality of this introduction, but, after all, your previous acquaintance — [DENYS *stares wildly.*] Under the circumstances, Blanche, I think I should give your little hand to kiss. [*A pause*] It is necessary to be polite, my niece.

[BLANCHE, *tormented beyond endurance, rises up as if to strike her uncle, sees DENYS, screams, covers her face with her hands, and sinks on the floor.*

BLANCHE.

That is not the man! — my uncle — that is not the man!

ALAIN.

[*Chuckles.*] So? Of course not. I expected as much. I was so unfortunate you could not remember his name.

BLANCHE.

This is not the man.

ALAIN.

“A” man, niece. [*Turns airily to DENYS.*] “*Tempetiva sequi viro,*” Monsieur Denys.

BLANCHE.

Indeed, indeed, I have never seen this person till this moment. [*Turns to DENYS imploringly.*] Sir, if you are a gentleman, you will bear me out. Have I seen you — have you ever seen me — before this accursed hour?

DENYS.

I have never had that pleasure. [*Turns to ALAIN.*] This is the first time, my lord, that I have ever met your engaging niece. [*Aside.*] But he doesn't care, he's mad — by 'r Lady, perhaps I'm mad myself.

[*Goes off into silent laughter. ALAIN checks him sternly.*]

ALAIN.

Sir, you will find I mean no jest.

DENYS.

Mademoiselle, I ask you a thousand pardons for this scene — none of my making, but of my strange fortune's.

ALAIN.

This gentleman drank a little too much for dinner.

DENYS.

Nay, by St. Denys, not enough, else had I been now along under Cousin Henri's table, and not in this house of maniacs and men-at-arms, and beauties in distress. Oh, pardon me, I am rude. [*With lively gallantry.*] Mademoiselle! I wrong myself when I forget myself: what I would say is that if the arm or brain of Denys de Beaulieu can save you, it is at your disposal [*starts: but serious, struck*] — I mean — [*Aside.*] St. Denys, what a coil is here! Is it possible that I love her?

[*He stands back, aside, amazed. His attitude vibrates between tender pitiful courtesy, lighted with love, and ironical appreciation of his own dilemma.*]

ALAIN.

I will leave you to talk alone.

[*Turns to leave.*]

BLANCHE.

[*Jumps up, and flings her arms around him. He repulses her not ungently. She clasps his knees, and he for the first time appears a little awkward and at a loss.*] Uncle, you cannot be in earnest. Why, I'll kill myself first — the heart rises at it — God forbids such marriages. Will you dishonour your white hair?

ALAIN.

Nay, mistress, I will save my brother's memory from shame.

BLANCHE.

O sir, pity me. There is not a woman in the world but would prefer death to such an union. Is it possible [*falters*] that you still think this [*points*

to DENYS, *who stands embarrassed and ashamed*  
to be the man?

ALAIN.

Frankly, I do. But let me explain to you once for all, Blanche de Maletroit, my way of thinking about this affair. [*Sternly.*] When you took it upon yourself to dishonour my family [BLANCHE *slides to floor and sobs*] and the name I have borne stainless in peace and war for more than threescore years, you forfeited not only the right to question my designs, but that of looking me in the face. I am a tenderer man than your father — he would have spat on you and thrust you from his door. But married you shall be, and that to-night. [*Turns to DENYS.*] And you, Monsieur, will best serve her if you save her. What devil have I saddled your life with that you look at me so black?

[*Turns on his heel and exit. A short silence of embarrassment.*]

BLANCHE.

[*Turns on DENYS with flashing eyes.*] And what, sir, may be the meaning of all this?

DENYS.

God knows; I am a prisoner in this house, which seems full of mad people. But I understand one thing, [*doubtfully*] I “think:” that you are to be married to me, and that your wishes are to be consulted as little as mine.

BLANCHE.

Monsieur, I blame myself cruelly for the position I have place you in.



DENYS.

Mademoiselle, I have at least the delicacy to refrain from asking any answer to these riddles. But —

BLANCHE.

O how my head aches! It is only fair to you to tell you —

DENYS.

A moment, of your grace, Mademoiselle. Do not think that I am some obscure fortune-hunter who will jump at the chance so strangely offered him. My name is as noble as your own — ay! were things otherwise, I would still spare you. As it is, I have but to do as my duty and my interest — any yours — demand. We will see if Monsieur de Maletroit can cage me here for ever. [*Looks at sword meditatively.*] That is unfortunate.

BLANCHE.

I am so afraid, sir: I know my uncle well: but — thank you, — thank you!

DENYS.

Is Monsieur de Maletroit at hand?

BLANCHE.

There is a servant within call.

[*Strikes gong thrice.*

[*A pause. Enter ANDREW.*

DENYS.

Ask Monsieur the Sire de Maletroit to honour us with his presence.

[*ANDREW bows and exit.*

BLANCHE.

Monsieur, I don't know what we — you — will do, but thank you — thank you.

DENYS.

[*Draw himself up.*] Ah! Mademoiselle, trust me, all will be well.

[*Enter ALAIN and ironically bows*

DENYS.

[*Grandly.*] Messire, I suppose that I am to have some say in the matter of this marriage, so let me tell you without further ado, I will be no party to forcing the inclinations of this lady. [ALAIN *smiles* DENYS *pauses.*] I — er — you understand me, sir? [ALAIN *still smiles.*] Had it been freely offered to me, I should have been proud to accept her hand, for I perceive she is as good as she is beautiful [ALAIN *still smiles*], but as things are — er — I have the honour, Messire, of refusing [ALAIN *smiles more and more*] — I — er — er —

[ALAIN'S *smile become positively insupportable* BLANCHE *smiles through her tears in gratitude and is secretly tickled at his confusion.* DENYS *gets annoyed, and swings away on his heel with an expression of disgust.*

ALAIN.

I am afraid, Monsieur de Beaulieu, that you do not perfectly understand — the alternative. Follow me, I beseech you, to this window. [*They cross to the window, DENYS shrugging his shoulders.*] Look out! [DENYS *looks out into the blackness.* ALAIN *points to just below.*] Here are hooks. Iron hooks. Fastened into the wall. Strong. [*They turn back into room.*] And there [*points*] is the Lady Blanche. And so, Monsieur Denys de Beaulieu, Damoiseau

de Beaulieu, in the province of Normandy, I do myself the honour to inform you that unless you are married to my niece in an hour's time, from these hooks you will hang. [BLANCHE screams aloud, and falls half fainting into a chair.] I trust your good sense will come to your aid, for of course it is not at all your death that I desire, but my niece's establishment in life. Your family, Monsieur de Beaulieu, is very well in its way, but if you sprang from Charlemagne you should not refuse the hand of a Maletroit with impunity — not if she had been as common as the Paris road, not if she were as hideous as the gargoyles on my roof. Neither my niece, nor you, nor my own private feelings move me in this matter. The honour of my house has been compromised: I believe you to be the guilty person: at least you are now in the secret; and though it will be no satisfaction to me to have your interesting relics kicking their heels from my battlements [*jerks his thumb toward the window*], if I cannot wipe out the dishonour, I shall at least stop the scandal.

DENYS.

Frankly, sir, I think your troubles must have turned your brain; there are other ways of settling such imbroglios among gentlemen.

ALAIN.

Alas, sir! I am old. When I was younger I should have been delighted to honour you; but I am the sole male member of my ancient house. Faithful retainers are the sinews of age, and I were a fool did I not employ the strength I have.

DENYS.

Oh, hang me now, and have done with it!

ALAIN.

No haste. An hour of life is always — an hour. And though one half that time is nigh lapsed already, yet — if you will give me your word of honour to do nothing desperate, and to await my return before you fling yourself from the window, — or, as I guess, — on the pikes of my retainers, I will withdraw myself and them that you may talk in greater privacy with the Lady Blanche. I fought at Arcy, and know what wonders may happen in an hour. [DENYS *turns bitterly, almost savagely, toward* BLANCHE.] You will not disfigure your last hour by want of politeness to a lady?

[DENYS *flushes, accepts the rebuke, bows to both and says simply:*

DENYS.

I give you my word of honour.

[*His decision is not uncoloured by the pathetic petitioning of the mute* BLANCHE.]

ALAIN.

I thank you sir; then I will leave you. [*Turns to go, stops.*] Sir, you are young, you think me a hard man, and perhaps a coward. Remember, pray, that the tears of age are frozen at the heart ere they can spring to the eyes. You may yet think better of the lonely old Sire de Maletroit, and the honour of his house may one day be your own.

[*Exit.*

[BLANCHE *comes over to* DENYS, *who remains leaning heavily on the table.*

BLANCHE.

Oh, sir, how cruelly have I done in my girl's folly, to bring a gallant gentleman to such a pass.

DENYS.

Ah! life is a little thing, fair lady. [*Sighs, gradually getting pleased with himself as a martyr.*] My mother is married again — she needs neither my arm nor my affection; my brother Guichard will inherit my fiefs, and unless I am mistaken, that will console him amply for my death; as for my father — why, I go to join him in an hour. Ay! lady, we are soon forgotten. It is barely ten years since he fell, fighting desperately, with many noble gentlemen around him, and — to-day — I doubt me if the very name of the battle lingers in men's minds! I go to join him in an hour.

BLANCHE.

[*Sighs.*] Ay! sir, you speak sad, but you speak true.

DENYS.

Will there be memory "there?" [DENYS *now fancies himself as a philosopher.*] For I would not marry you — nay! not though I loved you with my soul. In an hour you will be rid of me.

BLANCHE.

Oh, sir, do not be more cruel than our fate itself — to speak as if I could think so.

DENYS.

[*Pities himself.*] You will perhaps sigh once — I hope you will sigh once! — and then you will forget, and laugh, and go back to your old life. Ah! what can I think of all this?

BLANCHE.

I know what you must think, Monsieur de Beaulieu; you dare not say it — but you wrong me. Oh! before God, you wrong me.

DENYS.

[*Distressed.*] Don't! Don't!

BLANCHE.

Do yield: do marry me! Let me tell you how it all came about — you are so brave and young and handsome — I will not have you die.

DENYS.

You seem to think I stand in great fear of death.

BLANCHE.

[*Flushes at this boyish rudeness.*] But "I" will not have you die. I "will" marry you.

[*With determination.*

DENYS.

[*Aside.*] Here is love's language — and Lord knows who's meaning. [*Aloud.*] What you are too generous to refuse I may be too proud to accept.

BLANCHE.

[*Controls her indignation.*] O sir! listen! I have no mother — no father. I am very lonely — how can I tell you? [*Goes over and crouches on chair half-sobbing.*] Three months ago a young man began to stand near me in church. I — I could see I pleased him — and that pleased me; so I listened, when, as I went down the aisle, he whispered me such words as I passed — like poetry, they were so beautiful. I didn't know it was any harm — I let him write me letters, I was so glad that any one

should love me. And yesterday he asked me to meet him on the stairs, so that he might tell me with his own voice; but Uncle Alain found the letter, and oh! oh! [*Cries.*]

DENYS.

Poor child! [*Aside.*] By heaven, I do love her. Was ever a man so ill-placed to win a woman?

BLANCHE.

I would not have answered it — oh! Monsieur, I swear to you. I thought no wrong. But uncle shut me up in the chapel, and said I was to be married to-morrow — and — and — set a trap for you.

DENYS.

Mademoiselle, I never thought ill of you, believe me!

BLANCHE.

Then oh, sir! marry me! You shall never see me again, and I will — yes! I will — kill myself, and you shall be free and happy again. It can't hurt you much to say a few words in the chapel with me — and then go back. But pray for me when I am dead.

DENYS.

[*Struggling long with emotion, stops himself from crying and gives a forced laugh.*] Here's romance, if ever there was any. Dog that I am! To laugh when your pale sweet little body is all shaken with weeping. Mademoiselle — Blanche — listen to me, and do not talk such wild nonsense. I will not marry you. I do not love you, or you me. [*Aside.*] Half a lie is better than no truth. [*Aloud.*] I will not ruin your life — and I can commit suicide by merest idleness, a talent I am master of, and one most agreeable to my nature.

BLANCHE.

Oh! Monsieur Denys, but I love you. [*Comes and clings to his knees.*] I do! I do! I will not kill myself, but I will make you love me —

DENYS.

A harder task than you think, little one.

BLANCHE.

Or tolerate me at least. [*Cries.*]

DENYS.

O bother! I shall cry too in a minute.

BLANCHE.

You are very unkind. I hate you.

DENYS.

How much of all this is truth? What with pity and drawing-room manners and so on, truth is the kernel of a devilish hard nut. They say she lives at the bottom of a well — where one is drowned. [*Looks down, craning, as if into a well.*] St. Denys grant I may find her at the end of a rope — where one is hanged. [*With gesture appropriate.*]

[*BLANCHE curls herself up in chair and sobs bitterly.* DENYS goes to window and looks gloomily out.

[*Mimics ALAIN.*] Hooks. Iron hooks. Fastened into the wall. Strong. H'm! and there is the Lady Bl—— oh! cursed luck — do you clap me on the shoulder like a good comrade? No! you get round my neck like a lover! Oh! was ever gallant in such a scrape before? But dawn cannot be far off: I shall — swing myself lightly out of it.

BLANCHE.

[*Sobbing.*] Monsieur Denys! Monsieur Denys!



DENYS.

She has my name pat enough. O poor little girl! If only I didn't love her, with what a good will would I marry her. The nearer one comes to it, the clearer one sees that death is a dark and dusty corner, where a man lies hidden and forgotten till the archangel's — broom. I have few friends now: Once I am dead I shall have none.

BLANCHE.

[*Falters.*] You forget Blanche de Maletroit.

DENYS.

You have a sweet nature, Mademoiselle, and you are pleased to estimate a little service far beyond its worth.

BLANCHE.

No, sir, I say more: I recognise in you a spirit that should not give the "pas" to the noblest man in France.

DENYS.

And yet here I die in a mousetrap — with no more noise about it than my own squeaking. [*A pause.*]

BLANCHE.

I cannot have my champion think so meanly of himself.

DENYS.

[*Aside.*] Ah! could I forget that I was asked in pity and not in love!

[*Advances, checks himself, swings round and goes to window.*]

BLANCHE.

I know how you must despise me — oh! you are right. I am too poor a creature to occupy one thought of your mind. Alas! although you must die for me to-morrow — [*She stops short, and waits for him to respond, but DENYS is indeed thinking of something else.*] What! You are too proud to link yourself with the dishonoured house of Maletroit? I too have my pride: and now — and now — I would no more marry you than I would marry my uncle's groom.

[*Stamps her foot. DENYS turns round and looks at her inquiringly. He has not heard what she has been saying; he becomes again absorbed in his own thoughts. BLANCHE gets angrier and angrier, stamps again, and, not attracting his attention, falls into the chair and cries petulantly.*

BLANCHE.

It's too hard. To ask and be refused — I, a Maletroit. [*DENYS comes back into the room and faces her. She rises and strikes him across the face with her glove.*] Cowardly boy! [*DENYS turns furiously red, catches her suddenly in his arms and kisses her, flings her away, drops to the floor and groans in an agony of shame and love.*] Double coward! [*She reels away as if he had struck her: comes back to where he crouches, bends over him and strokes his hair.*] Denys! Monsieur Denys! I am so sorry. You are going to die so soon and I am rude to you — when it is all my fault.

[*DENYS rises and stands facing her manfully.*]

DENYS.

Die! Not I! Blanche, when I kissed you I loved you: I loved you when I saw you in the doorway, and I know you love me now.

BLANCHE.

Sir! I do not love you. How dare you speak to me so?

DENYS.

You love me. [*Laughing.*] Why, you "said" so!

BLANCHE.

You pass my patience, sir. I was acting, acting for your own safety. I made the most shameful declaration a maid can make for your sake — and you fling it in my teeth.

[DENYS *knows his triumph, and proceeds to enjoy it with laughing speech, as one with a petulant child.*

DENYS.

I fail to see that my safety is any the more assured now — without it. Yes, Monsieur de Maladroit, I accept your offer with the best will in the world.

BLANCHE.

O you despicable coward! I will kill you at the very altar-steps.

DENYS.

Yours is a wonderful strong family for killing, little one.

BLANCHE.

Mademoiselle de Maletroit is my name.

DENYS.

For half-an-hour — nay! barely that.

[BLANCHE stamps her foot and turns away angry. Breaks down and kneels in chair, crying. DENYS follows and stands above her.

DENYS.

O Blanche! Blanche! Do you not see how every tear is like a drop of poisonous dew falling on my heart? You have seen whether I fear death. No love worth Love's name ever yet needed to be asked. And yet — in words! If you care for me at all, do not let me lose my life in a misapprehension! Tho' I would die for you blithely, faith, I had rather live on — in your service. Can you love me a little? Fool! Fool! Ay, there's a pair of us — why do we wait here and let our happiness stand in the cold and knock at our door all night?

BLANCHE.

Don't! Don't make me more miserable and hopeless than I am.

[DENYS determines to make a general advance.

DENYS.

[Tenderly.] Little fool!

[He waits. She struggles in herself; and at last rueful and pouting, gets up and stands before him downcast, rubbing her eyes. He takes full advantage of his position.

[With mock severity.] Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

BLANCHE.

[*Sobbing.*] After all you have heard ?

DENYS.

[*With double entendre.*] I have heard nothing.

[*He opens his arms to her. She still stands about to sob again, breaks down, but this time flings herself on him and sobs on his breast. Enter ALAIN unseen.*

[*Softly.*] My darling!

[*BLANCHE raises her face. DENYS goes to kiss her, but she draws back.*

BLANCHE.

The captain's name was Florimond de Champ-divers.

DENYS.

I did not hear it. [*A pause.*] Blanche, will you kiss me ?

[*They take one long look and then tenderly and very deliberately kiss. They remain so, silently delighting in each other.*

ALAIN.

[*Comes forward with a chuckle.*] Good morning, nephew!

[*They leap up covered with confusion, recover their self-possession, and curtsy and bow respectfully, hand in hand.*

CURTAIN.