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HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

A Romantic Comedy in Three Acts.

By CONAL O'RIORDAN

(NORREYS CONNELL)

"Il est vrai qu' il y a des hommes qui n'ont point d'assez grandes qualités pour n'être pas obligés de cacher leurs foiblesses."

HENRI QUATRE, King of France (actually aged about five and fifty, but looking bare forty).

HENRI DE BALZAC, his favourite and Captain of the Guard. Age about 31.

SERGEANT OF THE GUARD, a stout old soldier of fifty.

CALVIN BOBILOT Musketeers of the Guard : young men rather less than 30.

GASTON, the King's valet, oldish middle-age.

THE PRINCE OF CONDE, a fretful two-and-twenty.

THE PRINCESS OF CONDE, scarce twenty, but already a rusée woman.

BRISSAC 35
TISSOT 30
DELONNAY 25. } Cavaliers of Condés party.

TELLIER, Innkeeper and Postmaster at Donnemarie. 50.

GILLES, his son, not more than two-and-twenty.

DURAND, Shopkeeper and Farmer. 50-55.

JOAN DURAND, his wife. 48 or 50.

ALIDA, their daughter. 18 or 20. A big girl.

THOMAS, Drawer at the inn. Youngish.

A POSTBOY.

A HORSEMAN.

Musketeers, Stable-boys, Villagers, etc.

The Scene is laid at the inn, "Au Bonheur du Roy," on the outskirts of Donnemarie, a village in Picardy, close to the frontier of the Spanish Netherlands. Time—Three hundred years ago.

ACT I.—The courtyard of the inn on a fine March afternoon. On the left of the audience a doorway to inn. On the right gateway to stables. In the back wall archway to high road showing fields beyond.

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Enter from inn Madame Durand, a pleasant-looking elderly woman, her husband, Michel Durand, a shopkeeper-farmer, and Tellier, the inn-keeper. Durand and Tellier are about fifty. Durand is optimist, Tellier pessimist, both are successful men in a very moderate way.

Tellier (grumbling) Ah! these are hard times, hard times, my neighbours. I never knew trade so bad. How, I ask you, is a poor inn-keeper to make both ends meet?

Durand. Come, when one talks of a wedding day one talks of happiness, Master Tellier.

Tellier. I do not hold with you at all, Master Durand.

Madame Dur. Why, what does one have a wedding day for but to make young people happy?

Tellier. I am not a young person, Madame Durand.

Durand. You were young once, Master Tellier.

Tellier (cautiously) Maybe so, Master Durand.

Durand. And your married young, Master Tellier?

Tellier (gravely) Too young, Master Durand.

Madame Dur. In our rank one cannot marry too young.

Durand (rallying him) Nor were you so young but you remember your wedding day as the happiest day of your life.

Tellier (sullenly) I remember my wedding day as the most damnable day I ever passed.

Durand (shocked) 'Twas never your good wife to blame—she that lived honestly by you fifteen good years till the plague took her, as it took the curate and the bishop, though the last was a great man and a saint of God (*lifting his hat*) ha' mercy on him.

Tellier. Ay, and it took another great man that was no saint of God, though they buried him by the bishop and put the handsomer stone over him.

Durand (exchanging a glance with his wife, who coughs) Ah . . . the last lord of the manor. Was it he that spoilt thy wedding day?

Tellier (nodding) May the ghost of his tombstone pinch him in hell.

Durand (piously) Amen, amen. But think, friend, those evil days are gone. There will be no lord's cruelty to spoil the wedding to-morrow when your boy marries our girl.

Tellier. Wait till to-morrow be past, say I.

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- Durand.* Come, neighbour, no ill talk will fright us. Since
good King Henry came upon the throne . . .
- Tellier.* There has been great naughtiness at Court.
- Madame Dur.* (*somewhat contemptuously*) What know you of
courts?
- Tellier (bitterly)* I know more of courts and kings' ways than you
think. (*He looks hard at her, but she meets
him unflinchingly*).
- Madame Dur.* I think no more than another, Master Tellier.
- Durand.* 'Tis not for you, who hold the King's licence, to
dispraise His Majesty.
- Tellier.* I say naught against the King, but I would not have
him licence my daughter, too.
- Durand.* This is not the Court; though the King foul his own
nest, he lets honest men go free.
- Tellier.* I have heard he is chasing the Prince of Condé
through the land to take his newly-wed princess
from him.
- Durand.* Come, come, the King is as old, or older, than you
or I. (*Appealing to his wife who has stood
aside*) Joan, is it not so?
- Madame Dur.* (*turning back to them*) The King? (*Goes up
stage and looks out through arch over the fields*)
Ay, I remember, thirty years ago, when they
fought the Spaniards yonder by the mill, and
down in Mountjoy's meadows, he lay at my
father's house that night. He was a man then
nearly thirty. I was a girl. 'Tis long ago.
(*coming down to them*) I'm an old woman.
He is older still.
- Tellier (hardly)* Kings never grow old. They are not working men.
- Durand.* Well, I thank God my daughter, though fair and
upright as a lily, is no flower for a king to crop.
I would as soon be fearful of my old wife here
as of my daughter.
- Tellier.* They say at times all cats are grey.
- Durand (slightly vexed)* I'll have you know my daughter is neither
cat nor grey, but fair and virtuous, and knows
her station.
- Tellier (giving ground)* Well, pray Heaven, she knows no other
station than my son. . . . Here he comes,
and I warrant no king in France has a hand-
somer face than he. (*Points through archway*).

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Durand. And see how my daughter follows him, loving and innocent as lamb follows shepherd.

Tellier (gloomily) I never saw lamb follow shepherd yet, but I have seen a butcher follow a lamb.

Madame Dur. Out on your ill-nature—you are no father worthy so brave a son.

Tellier. I hope your daughter may be saying as much next week.

Durand. Let's stand aside and watch them.

Tellier. I think they are quarrelling already.

Durand (taking them behind inn door) Hist!

(Enter through archway Gilles, a strapping young country fellow, followed by Alida, a fine figure of a girl).

Alida (pleadingly) Will you not listen to me?

Gilles (angrily) No.

Alida (tired) You won't listen to me?

Gilles. No.

Alida. Then I'll not run after you any more.

Gilles (looking round surprised) Why not?

Alida. I'll not have you make a fool of me like this.

Gilles. 'Tis you who make a fool of me.

Alida. Your father did that before I was born.

Durand (delighted) My girl has wit! My girl has wit!

Tellier. I wonder where she got it.

Gilles. If my father made me a fool he made me an honest fool.

Alida. D'ye mean I'm not honest?

Gilles. I'd be a proved fool to say so before to-morrow.

Alida (enraged) You'll have nothing to say about me to-morrow.

Gilles (alarmed) What d'ye mean?

Alida. There are as good hinds in the fields as you.

Gilles. Ay, and as many furrows.

Alida. Y'are unmannerly.

Gilles. I'd ha' been a good mate, anyhow.

Alida. I'll marry a lad with more way with him.

Gilles. You'd provoke a saint of Heaven.

Alida. Had I known you were a saint of Heaven, I'd never have taken you.

Gilles. But take me you did, and maybe your saint has a touch of the devil in him. *(Seizes her suddenly and kisses her with clumsy passion).*

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- Alida.* Paws off! Saucy Satan the saint unmasked. (*Boxes his ears and shakes him off*).
- Gilles.* What are you after now?
- Alida.* No kissing till the times comes.
- Gilles (grumpily)* May the time never come—if you treat me like that. You spitfire. . . . You——
- Alida.* I'll teach you to call names, you tyrant. (*Rushes at him, but he eludes her and runs off into stable yard, she pursuing him fiercely*).
- Tellier.* I'll after them—she'll scratch his eyes out.
- Durand.* Not she; she'll kiss her own reflected beauty in them.
- Madame Dur.* This is a lovers' quarrel.
- Tellier.* A little more love and I lose my heir.
- Durand.* A little more love and your heirs are mine.
- Tellier.* Come through the yard and I'll send him back to keep house while I'm away. (*Exeunt through the stable gate. The stage is empty a moment. The trotting of horses is heard, and two Cavaliers and a carrosse enter through arch at the back of the stage. It is drawn by a single pair of horses, and is in a very battered condition. On the near horse is a postboy, and in the carrosse a young lady and a young gentleman*).
- First Cavalier (called Brissac) (dismounting and civilly approaching the carrosse)* This is the post-house, my Prince. Will your Highness descend while relays are found?
- Prince (testily)* Are there no horses ready?
- Brissac.* It seems not.
- Post-boy (who has dismounted and summoned the house)* Nothing ever is ready in Donnemarie. House! House! (*Enter a Drawer from inn, who gapes at the cavalcade*).
- Brissac.* Holloa, fellow! Have you any horses?
- Drawer.* Horses? Me? I have but my keep and what the guests please to give me.
- Brissac.* Fool! Has your master horses?
- Drawer.* I doubt he has, wherever they are.
- Brissac.* Where is your master?
- Drawer.* I doubt he's out with Master Durand.
- Brissac.* Who is in charge here?
- Drawer.* Me and the horse marshal.
- Brissac.* Call your horse marshal, then—that's what we want.

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- Drawer (shaking his head)* You'll get no horses to-day.
- Brissac.* And why not, sirrah?
- Drawer.* 'Cos the young master's to be married to-morrow.
- Brissac.* What has that to do with it?
- Drawer.* We'll want the horses to bring home the bride.
- Prince (he is a peevish fellow of two-and-twenty, leaps out of the carrosse in a rage)* There is a bride here to be brought home by all the horses in France!
- Drawer (falling on his knees frightened)* O good my lord, is it the King's own dollymop?
- Prince (in a rage)* Scandal! Scandal! Crop me the rascal's ears.
- Drawer.* Mercy! mercy! (*Flees into house pursued by the horsemen, who have dismounted and left their cattle in charge of the post-boy. He leads them into the yard.*)
- Prince (pacing up and down the stage in a fury)* Scandal! scandal . . . most monstrous. . . . most horrible.
- Princess (descending from carrosse)* My Prince, my beloved, what can scandal harm us? Soon we shall be across the frontier, soon at Brussels, under the protection of the Archdukes, and then——
- Prince.* More scandal. Brussels thrives on scandal.
- Princess.* You will force Brussels to remember that I am the Prince of Condé's wife.
- Prince.* I cannot force Brussels to forget that you were the Queen of France's Maid of Honour. . . . which is no honour at the Court of Henry the Amorous.
- Princess.* No one dared speak light of me there.
- Prince.* There you had the King's protection.
- Princess.* Now I have yours.
- Prince.* I am not a sovereign prince—and if I were, there is no prince temporal or spiritual dare face King Henry.
- Princess.* What help can the Archdukes give us?
- Prince.* Heaven only knows. . . . There will be bloody wars to pay for this escapade.
- Princess (bitterly)* Rather than that, had we not better wait for the King—he cannot be a league behind us on the road.
- Prince.* No, no . . . perdition! no. . . . If we had horses. . . .

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- Princess.* He can get horses, too. Sooner or later you must yield me to him. . . .
- Prince.* No, no. . . . A chance remains.
- Princess.* A chance remains?
- Prince.* Soft, in your ear. . . . There is a plot afoot to kill the King.
- Princess (excited and troubled)* You dare kill him?
- Prince.* I? No. . . . I am his cousin. But as Henry gallops, death gallops with him.
- Princess.* Tell me more.
- Prince.* You know enough. All turns on this. If he do overtake us here, death overtakes him ere he goes further. (*Rapping at inn door*) Horses! horses! horses! (*Enter Gilles from the yard hastily*).
- Gilles.* My lord, my lady, my father is abroad. . . Does no one serve you?
- Prince.* Who are you?
- Gilles.* The King's postmaster's son, so please you.
- Prince.* Then find me horses—four, and fleet ones.
- Gilles.* It shall be done at once, my lord. (*Bowing to her*) My lady. (*Exit to yard*).
- Prince.* That's a great galliard.
- Princess.* He seems the sovereign prince of Donnemarie. (*Re-enter Gilles*).
- Gilles.* The horses come from pasture, but they're fleet ones. Can I not serve my lord to some refreshment? My lady?
- Prince.* Horses! horses! horses!
- Princess (reprovingly)* Prince, I want food.
- Gilles.* Madame, I have food worthy a Princess, baked for a wedding feast.
- Princess.* My mouth waters. Hand me in, my Prince. (*The Prince does not stir; she gives her hand to Gilles, but the Prince wakes up and thrusts him aside*).
- Prince.* We lose precious time. (*Aside to Princess*) You know I have no money. (*To Gilles*) See that the horses are put to at once.
- Gilles (bowing them both into house)* It shall be done, my Prince. (*When they are gone into the house, he kisses his own hand and gazes after them*) O exquisite Princess! . . . O fortunate wedding feast. O happy, happy Gilles. . . . (*Turning to*

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carrosse) Her carriage where she sat. . . .
(Kissing them) Thrice blessed cushions. . . .
 O what a thing it is to be in love! *(Listening)*
 She calls, she calls! Coming, my lady, coming!
(Exit with a rush to house. Enter from the house Tissot and Brissac with winecups in their hands and smoking long pipes).

- Tissot.* How far behind think you the King is now?
Brissac. Two hours, or three—or would be but for the foundering of our leaders at La Ferté.
- Tissot.* We lost near a glass there, and have not travelled half the pace since.
- Brissac.* Still I make him a full hour behind. Spanish Miguel would be after us if the chase pressed much closer, and Delannoy if it came within the league. *(Horse heard off).*
- Tissot (going up to arch and pointing off)* Is that not one of ours on the crest of the hill?
- Brissac.* Is't Miguel? *(Dropping his pipe)* 'Tis Delannoy! We are lost if the horses come not. Summon the Prince. *(Exit Tissot to house. Enter Delannoy through arch on a distressed horse)* Where is Miguel?
- Delannoy.* Miguel is a prisoner. The King himself took him and would have taken me, but I snapped my pistol at him.
- Brissac.* Was he wounded?
- Delannoy.* No, but his horse was, and I doubt the King has a rope for me if we meet again.
- Brissac.* We all swing together. To cross the King's love affairs is high treason.
- Delannoy.* But our Master the Prince——
- Brissac.* As his Majesty's mistress's husband he is privileged and goes free—so long as he does not take his wife with him.
- Delannoy.* But if the King overtake the couple here, as he is like to do—what then?
- Brissac.* For the Prince and Princess—*toujours la politesse.* But for us—the rope.
- Delannoy.* Then I'll put another league betwixt me and the King.
- Brissac.* No, no, my friend. You forget your pistol. That is the thing to put between you and the King.

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At all costs we stay him here until their Highnesses are safe in Flanders.

Delannoy. How many of us are in this?

Brissac. Half-a-dozen good fellows, with blunt faces and sharp swords.

Delannoy. D'ye mean to kill the King?

Brissac. I mean to earn my pay.

Delannoy (meditatively) I have never yet killed a king.

Brissac. 'Tis royal sport. Harry's a stag will toss many a hound ere he go down. I would I were on his side, but pay is pay, and (*jerking his thumb contemptuously towards inn*) even his pay is better than starvation . . . and what's a man to do when there's no war? (*Enter Prince hastily from inn, followed by Gilles waiting on Princess*).

Prince. Morbleu! where are the horses?

Gilles. They come, my Prince. (*The horses are brought from yard and harnessed to carrosse by stable boys. A small crowd gathers on stage. Tellier rushes through arch and across stage into house, followed by Alida, who does not see Gilles busy with the horses*).

Prince (to Princess) I have no money . . . have you money? What the devil are we to do?

Princess (to Prince) Leave that to me. (*To Gilles*) They are beautiful, your horses.

Gilles. There are no better in the province, Madame. I chose them to bring home my bride.

Princess. I know not how to reward your generosity.

Gilles (abjectly) If I might but kiss your Highness's foot. . . .

Princess. It is not thus we kiss at Court. (*Ogles him and turns away*).

Gilles (following her) Dare I then kiss your hand?

Princess (shaking her head) It is not thus we kiss at Court.

Gilles (troubled) How then?

Princess (having drawn him aside) Why, thus we kiss at Court. (*Kisses him on the lips. Amazed, but delighted, he returns the kiss, and they stand a moment so, when Alida enters from inn and perceives them*).

Alida (thunderstruck) Gilles!

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- Princess (glancing at her not at all discomposed)* Ah, the chamber-maid. . . . Do you want money, girl?
- Alida.* I don't want your money.
- Princess (mildly surprised to Gilles)* What does she want?
- Gilles (half consciously)* Nothing. (*He kisses her once again*).
- Prince.* The carriage waits. . . . (*Turning he perceives the Princess kiss Gilles as do all the others*) Charlotte, this is too much! What does this mean?
- Princess (turning to him smilingly)* A secret you shall hear at Brussels. (*Leaping into carrosse*).
- Prince (bewildered, as Gilles approaches feels in his pockets)* My purse . . . where is my purse. What is there to pay?
- Gilles.* All is paid, my Prince. All paid. (*Bows him into carrosse and shuts door*) Adieu, most exquisite Princess.
- Princess.* Adieu for ever! (*The carrosse rolls off, crowd running after it, and Gilles watching from archway*).
- Brissac.* And now, my friends, to horse. (*The three cavaliers mount. Enter Tellier with bill*).
- Tellier (to Brissac)* 'Tis you, my lord, who pays? (*The cavaliers laugh*).
- Brissac.* No, no. The Princess has paid for all. We follow her to Brussels.
- Tellier (respectfully)* Do you return, my lord?
- Brissac.* If we ever return, you shall know of it. (*Exeunt cavaliers, laughing*).
- Tellier (to Gilles)* Is this true? Did the Princess give you the money?
- Gilles (still entranced)* Money . . . ha!
- Alida.* I'll tell you what she gave him—she gave him (*clenching her hands*) a kiss.
- Tellier (not understanding)* How much?
- Alida.* A score . . . and he gave her . . .
- Tellier (mystified)* The change?
- Alida.* In full measure.
- Tellier.* See here, Gilles, where is the money the lady gave you?
- Gilles.* O exquisite Princess! (*Exit through archway up the road*).
- Tellier (angrily to Alida)* You have turned my son's head with your love-making.

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Alida (almost in tears) No poor country girl could do that. 'Tis that scabby Princess. But I'll be even with them both. I'll not be despised by any bottle-washer in Christenty. My father shall know of this. I'll have the law of you, and if the King himself comes after me he shall have me for better or worse. (*Exit, crying, through arch and down road*).

Tellier (enraged) A murrain on all petticoats! say I, that rob honest inn-keepers of their reckonings and all men of their senses. If women wore breeches the world would be the better for it, and Heaven no worse. (*Exit to inn. The waning light suggests sunset, and evening draws in. Re-enter Alida with her father comforting her*).

Durand. There, there, child, dry your eyes, dry your eyes, and tell your old father what ails you at all.

Alida (through her sobs) Nothing, nothing, nothing. Only the Princess has ravished my true love.

Durand. What Princess, honey?

Alida. The slutty Princess from Paris, and I'm not your honey any more, father. I'm soured, soured.

Durand. What Princess from Paris? Be calm, loved daughter; calm yourself and tell your father all.

Alida. She that was the King's. . . . I don't know what . . . and has married a Prince too good for her, and now she wants my Gilles, my own true honey love was to wed me to-morrow. O, dear Mary Virgin, what shall I do?

Durand. There, there, dear child. If the Princess has done any mischief thoughtlessly, as Court ladies will, she's gone away for ever.

Alida. Ay, but my sweetheart's heart's gone with her . . . rolled away down the road to Flanders, leaving my own heart, my own true heart, broken here on the road behind him.

Durand. You're young, my great sweet daughter, and if hurt's done, time will mend it.

Alida. Time will never mend a broken heart—at least, so the songs says.

Durand. Well, well, let us ask Master Tellier what he thinks of this. Court custom wrought him some damage once upon a time, but I doubt his heart's well

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mended. (*Exit with his daughter to inn. Horse heard outside. Then enter hastily on foot the King and Balzac with his sword drawn. N.B. —The King has the appearance of a comely man in the prime of life.*)

Balzac (trying to cover the King) Beware, sire, how you go. Here may be assassins.

King (hotly) What care I for assassins? This is the post-house, yet I see no coach.

Balzac. No . . . there is none. They have found horses and gone on towards Brussels.

King. We must find horses and pursue.

Balzac. Sire, we can do nothing till my men catch us up.

King. By then they will be safe in Flanders.

Balzac. Better that than your Majesty in his grave.

King (pacing up and down as did Condé before)

O love, thou impish torturer of kings!

Shall I die underneath the swords of Condé's knaves

Or burst my heart counting the minutes lost.

Young man, pray Heaven you may not come to love.

Balzac. Any love of mine will ever be at your Majesty's disposal.

King (heartily) Loyal fellow!

Balzac. I beseech your Majesty to be reasonable.

King. Dost dare to reason with a king in love?

Balzac. Ay, and dare tell him why he must not love

King. Say'st thou I must not? . . . Who dare hinder me?

Balzac. I would persuade your Majesty to think—

We cannot hope to stay the Princess now.

She must be safe at Landrecies at least.

At Landrecies in Flanders.

King. Myself has been at Landrecies ere this,

And had my will there.

Balzac. Time was, your Majesty, when we had war.

King. I'll loose another war rather than lose

My pleasure.

Balzac. Sire, you cannot make

A war with fifty troopers. The Archdukes

King. I'd face the Archdukes with my single sword

And level Brussels flat as Amsterdam.

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- Balzac.* 'Tis not the Archdukes only—there is Spain.
King. I'll drive all Spain to refuge in the Indies.
Balzac. If you touch Spain, you touch the Kaiser, too.
King. I'll whip him howling through all Germany
 Over the Alps to Rome.
Balzac. And there's the Pope.
 And then your Majesty can do no more.
King. No more! I'll take Pope Clement's triple crown
 And break it on his pate if he outstare me.
Balzac. He'll excommunicate you.
King. Tut! he dare not go so far.
Balzac. Would'st thou lift up Olympus?
King. If Jupiter would rob me of my love
 I'd batter down Olympus with my guns
 And strew the earth with particles of gods.
Balzac (incisively) Your Majesty is mightiest of kings,
 But there is that even you cannot do . . .
 Make a cracked vessel whole.
King (appalled) Condé dare not . . . she is his wife in name.
Balzac. Sire, Condé's wife is any man's, in fact.
 She is a wanton.
King (drawing his sword) Villain, you die for this.
Balzac (opening his arms) Strike, O King!
King (dropping his sword) 'Tis I am stricken. (*Sheathes his sword*)
 Alas, alas, there is no faith in woman . . .
 Would I had given her to you and not to Condé.
 You would not have deserted me in my old age and
 taken her with you.
Balzac. Your gracious Majesty is not so old he will not love
 again.
King. Dost take me for a weather cock? When a king
 comes to love at fifty-five his love is constant,
 and with a passion youth cannot guess. If he
 lose this quarry, Harry shall hunt no more, or
 ever know the joy of Spring.
Balzac. Your Majesty is melancholy . . . he wants food.
King. The only food for my appetite speeds towards
 Flanders.
 Come, horses, horses, we must follow it.
Balzac (giving it up in despair) I'll look here in the inn-yard. (*Exit.*
Alida comes out of the inn, when the King per-
ceives and stops her).
King (holding up her chin) What do I behold?

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- Alida.* Gently, sir. Who are you?
King. I am the wretchedest man in France . . . and you?
- Alida.* The wretchedest maid.
King. There's sympathy between us. I am crossed in love.
Alida. And I.
King. More sympathy. (*Sitting down on bench*) Come, tell me your troubles.
- Alida.* I was to be married to-morrow. . . .
King (nodding his head sympathetically) Ah, was it come to that?
Alida. And now my lover's run away with a Court lady.
King (mystified) Do you mean with a courtesan?
Alida. She was a Princess, and they say the King's love.
King (half understanding) A Princess and the King's love. . . .
 Monstrous! . . . Your lover has run away with the Princess of Condé?
- Alida.* That's her name. She stole his heart, and he ran after her, and I'll never see him again. And oh! if I could only be revenged—I'd give my maiden honour for revenge.
- King (leaping up)* You shall be revenged. I promise that.
Alida (gaping) How? You promise what?
King. You shall be Princess and the King's love.
Alida (shrinking from him) Who are you to talk like that?
King (lifting his hat with his most fascinating grace) Do you not know me?
- Alida (clapping her hands with delight)* O what pretty hair!
King (delighted) D'ye like my hair? Whose it it . . . can you guess?
- Alida (overwhelmed)* Can it be the King? . . . Your Majesty.
King. Not majesty to you—plain Harry. . . .
Alida. But my father . . .
King. He shall have a peerage or a pension.
Alida. My mother? . . .
King. The Wardrobe, or the Bedchamber.
Alida. And my lover? . . .
King. I am your lover.
Alida (bewildered) I mean my other lover.
King. He shall have a whipping . . . or what you will.
 What is your name?
- Alida.* My name is Alida.
King. Your name is what?
Gilles (outside, calling) Alida! Alida!

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

Alida. Mercy on us! (*Swoons in King's arms*).

King (*pleased, yet perplexed*) There, there, sweet maiden. Be brave as you are lovely, and take your honours like a woman of the world. As you are beautiful, be strong.

(*While he is holding and caressing her, Gilles comes in at the back through the dusk*).

Gilles (*calling softly*) *Alida.* Alida! (*Suddenly perceiving her in the stranger's arms*) Villain, that woman is my affianced wife. Unhand her.

King. Pish!

Gilles. Unhand her, I say, or I will have your life. (*Snatching out a dagger and offering to stab him*).

King (*passing the girl behind him, where she stands dazed, and waving Gilles airily aside*) I am the King.

Gilles (*astounded*) The King! (*Enter Balzac*).

Balzac. Sire! Night falls, 'tis six o'clock; but I have found horses, and the escort is at hand. Will your Majesty deign to mount?

King (*unabashed*) No—we lie here to-night.

Balzac (*gleefully but astonished, knocks at inn-door with his whip*) House! house! His Majesty the King lies here to-night.

Gilles (*trying to catch her hand in despair*) *Alida.*

Alida (*repulsing him*) Keep your place.

(*Enter from all sides Tellier, Drawers, Stableboys, etc., crying*
The King . . . the King lies here to-night!
(*A distant church bell rings three times*).

King (*lifting his hand*) Hush! (*The Angelus bell is heard again to ring three chimes, and King, Gilles, Balzac, Alida and all kneel together as the curtain falls*)