

THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

By Horace Walpole

Adapted for the Stage by James Armstrong

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SYNOPSIS: According to legend, “The Castle and Lordship of Otranto shall pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it.” Manfred, the descendant of a usurping Lord of Otranto isn’t bothered by the legend, until his son is crushed to death by a giant helmet falling from the sky! Manfred’s only child now is a girl, Matilda, but she has fallen in love with a young peasant named Theodore. Could it be that Theodore is the descendant of the rightful heir to Otranto? And what of those rumors of a giant in the castle, which Manfred so easily dismisses?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8MEN, 4 WOMEN, 1-4 EXTRAS)

MANFRED (m) The usurping lord of Otranto. *(156 lines)*

HIPPOLITA (f)..... Manfred’s wife. *(40 lines)*

MATILDA (f)..... Manfred’s daughter. *(78 lines)*

ISABELLA (f)..... Manfred’s ward, betrothed to his son,
Conrad. *(54 lines)*

THEODORE (m)..... A peasant. *(80 lines)*

BIANCA (f)..... A maid attending Matilda. *(63 lines)*

JAQUEZ (m) A guard in the castle. *(16 lines)*

DIEGO (m) Another guard in the castle. *(6 lines)*

FATHER JEROME (m)..... A friar. *(47 lines)*

LOPEZ (m) A servant in the castle. *(4 lines)*

KNIGHT (m) A stranger. *(31 lines)*

ANCESTOR (m)..... Of Manfred. (5 lines)

HERALD (m) Of the knight. (4 lines)

HERMIT (m) An old man. (7 lines)

GUARDS (m)..... Of Manfred. Two. (*GUARD 1 - - 4 lines;*
GUARD 2 - - 2 lines)

PRODUCTION NOTES

COSTUMING:

The story takes place during the Middle Ages around the time of the first Crusades. However, costumes should be loose interpretations of a mythical fairy-tale type past rather than recreations.

MANFRED: Fine clothes, black cloak, gold chain.

HIPPOLITA: Queenly robe.

MATILDA: At first a nightgown, then a lush, colorful dress.

ISABELLA: Black mourning dress.

THEODORE: Simple tunic and trousers.

BIANCA: At first a nightgown, then a simple servant's dress.

FATHER JEROME: Brown friar's robe.

KNIGHT: If possible, a helmet with a visor.

ANCESTOR: Rich, purple garments.

HERMIT: Burlap cloak, white face paint.

JAQUEZ, DIEGO, LOPEZ, HERALD, GUARDS, etc.: Colorful tabards

For the dumb show in Act TWO, Scene 1:

GUARDS: Pirate costumes, black clothes, eye patches.

FIRST GUARD: Tabard with cross.

LOPEZ: Mother costume with wig and dress.

THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

SET:

An elaborate set is not necessary. Changes in lighting and a few simple pieces of furniture can distinguish one scene from another.

Act One, Scene 1: A life-sized portrait of the ancestor painted on a scrim. When a light shines through the back of the scrim, it will reveal the actor playing the ancestor. Ideally, the portrait should also be on a hinge to open like a door. A regular door should also be placed on the side of the stage, and there should be a chair for Isabella.

Act One, Scene 2: A trap door. Otherwise the stage is bare, and has a shaft of light shining in from above.

Act One, Scene 3: Again, a trap door, but some small pieces of furniture, such as a chair and dressing table, can clarify that this is a room in the castle, rather than the underground passage of Act One, Scene 2.

Act One, Scene 4: A tapestry or a small throne for Manfred can indicate that this is a room in the castle.

Act One, Scene 5: A long table with two chairs.

Act One, Scene 6: A simple prison-cell mat for Theodore.

Act One, Scene 7: An empty stage.

Act Two, Scene 1: A bed.

Act Two, Scene 2: A statue of Alfonso. He should not be wearing a helmet.

Act Two, Scene 3: The same as Act One, Scene 3.

Act Two, Scene 4: The same as Act Two, Scene 2.

PROPS:

Act One, Scene 1: Book for Manfred

Act One, Scene 2: Key for Isabella

Act One, Scene 3: Comb for Bianca

Act One, Scene 4: Gauntlet for Herald

Act One, Scene 5: Goblet for Manfred

Act One, Scene 7: Swords for Theodore and Knight

Act Two, Scene 1: Swords for Pirate and Captain, Parchment for Mother

Act Two, Scene 3: Jewel for Manfred

Act Two, Scene 4: Dagger for Manfred, Parchment for Father Jerome

STAGE EFFECTS:

LIVING PORTRAIT: Material for a scrim can be obtained from most theatrical supply companies. When lit from the front, the material appears opaque, and when lit from behind, it becomes transparent. The front of the scrim should be painted with a picture of a man wearing the same costume as the Ancestor. A light should be placed behind the scrim, and the actor playing the ancestor should stand behind it. When the light goes on, the image painted on the scrim will dissolve, and the living figure of the actor behind it will be revealed.

BLEEDING STATUE: A life-sized statue can be constructed out of paper maché. In the original production, a super-soaker water gun was filled with fake blood and placed inside the statue. Tubing connected to the water gun squirted blood out of the nose of the statue to tremendously gory effect. (The more blood, the better!) A techie hidden behind the statue can operate the water gun.

GIANT SHADOW: A simple lighting gobo can create the effect of the shadow of a giant head and shoulders. If one is not available, there can be a complete blackout of the entire stage, followed by a spotlight on Theodore and the raising of the lights back to normal.

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A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF HORACE WALPOLE

Horace Walpole was born in 1717, son of Sir Robert Walpole, the longest-ruling Prime Minister in British history. Despite the fact that he hated politics, Horace was elected to Parliament while on vacation on the Continent. Unsure of what to do with his father's massive fortune, Horace decided to spend some of it on a small printing company to publish the poetry of his friend. The plan backfired, as the friend turned out to be the great poet Thomas Gray, and Walpole ended up making even more money.

Stuck with a profitable press, Horace dashed off a book of his own: *The Castle of Otranto*. Surely now he would at last be rid of some of that pesky wealth. But alas, it was not to be! The book was a huge success, and the public demanded subsequent printings.

Rarely has one book had as much influence as *The Castle of Otranto*. It single-handedly started the Gothic movement in literature, influencing Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, and the Brontë sisters. The Gothic novel in turn gave rise to many of the genres we read today, including mystery, horror, and science fiction.

Mr. Walpole did eventually find a way to get rid of some of his fortune by renovating his estate on Strawberry Hill in Twickenham. The renovations prompted many visitors and started a Gothic movement in architecture as well. In 1791, he was named the fourth Earl of Orford, though he never took his place in the House of Lords. He died in 1797, but the Gothic movement he began continues to affect popular literature to this day.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE:

A room in the Castle of Otranto. There is a door and a huge life-sized portrait of an ANCESTOR of MANFRED. MANFRED sits alone, reading a book to himself.

MANFRED: "The Castle and Lordship of Otranto shall pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it." *(Throwing down the book.)* Rubbish! You can't make any sense of it anyway. *(A knock.)* Who's there?

MATILDA: *(Opening the door.)* My dearest father, it is I, your daughter.

MANFRED: Begone! I do not want a daughter.

MATILDA: But Father - -

MANFRED: *(Pushing her out.)* - - I said begone! *(MANFRED goes back to sulking amid his books. Soon, there is a second knock.)* Who's there now?

ISABELLA: *(Offstage.)* Isabella.

MANFRED: And what do you want?

ISABELLA: *(Offstage.)* I was sent for, my lord.

MANFRED: Oh! *(Letting her inside.)* Come in, please. Sit down. I sent for you, lady, on a matter of great importance. Dry your tears, young lady. You have lost your bridegroom - -

ISABELLA: - - The horror of the spectacle! To be crushed by - - by a giant helmet!

MANFRED: Yes. I must admit, it is a bit odd. I've been searching through these books all day and have yet to find a precedent.

ISABELLA: Most strange!

MANFRED: Most strange indeed! To fall from the sky without the least explanation.

ISABELLA: Well, they say that the helmet is exactly like that on the figure of Alfonso the Good.

MANFRED: Where did you hear that?

ISABELLA: It is common talk among the servants that this very day the helmet disappeared from the statue in the church of St. Nicholas.

MANFRED: Lies! Conrad's death has nothing to do with Alfonso.

ISABELLA: If you say so, my lord.

MANFRED: Alfonso's statue is no bigger than the man. And you saw that helmet! It crushed my son flat in one blow.

ISABELLA: It is, my lord, most strange.

MANFRED: I had the villain imprisoned who uttered that slander.

ISABELLA: You threw him in the dungeon?

MANFRED: No, I put him inside the helmet. He'll not escape, though. It took three men just to lift the visor.

ISABELLA: Most strange!

MANFRED: Isabella, you have lost a bridegroom - - yes, cruel fate! And I have lost all hopes of my race! But Conrad was not worthy of your beauty.

ISABELLA: My lord! Surely you do not suspect me of not feeling - -

MANFRED: - - Think no more of him. He was a sickly, puny child, and heaven has taken him away that I might not trust my house on so frail a foundation. The line of Manfred calls for - - numerous supports. *(MANFRED leans menacingly on the back of ISABELLA's chair. She gets up, and MANFRED topples the chair over.)* My foolish fondness for that boy blinded the eyes of my prudence. I hope, in a few years, to have reason to rejoice at the death of Conrad.

ISABELLA: Good my lord, do not doubt my tenderness! My heart would have accompanied my hand. Conrad would have engrossed all my care, and wherever fate shall dispose of me, I shall always regard your highness, and the virtuous Hippolita, as my parents.

MANFRED: Curse on Hippolita! Forget her from this moment, as I do. Lady, you have missed a husband undeserving of your charms. Instead of a sickly boy, you shall have a husband in the prime of his age.

ISABELLA: Alas! My lord, my mind is too sadly engrossed by the recent catastrophe to think of another marriage. If ever my father returns and it shall be his pleasure, I shall obey, but until his return, permit me to remain under your roof and employ the hours attending you and Hippolita - -

MANFRED: - - I desired you once before not to name that woman. From this hour she must be a stranger to you, as she must be to me. In short, Isabella, since I cannot give you my son, I offer you myself.

ISABELLA: Heavens! You, my lord! You?! My father-in-law! The father of Conrad! The husband of the virtuous and tender Hippolita!

MANFRED: I tell you, Hippolita is no longer my wife. I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness. My fate depends on having sons, and this night, I trust, will give a new date to my hopes.

MANFRED seizes ISABELLA by her hand, and she shrieks. Lightning flashes and there is the roar of thunder.

ISABELLA: Look, my lord! See! Heaven itself declares against your impious intentions!

MANFRED: Heaven nor hell shall impede my designs!

Another flash of lightning and crash of thunder. A light shines through the scrim of the portrait and reveals an ANCESTOR behind it who looks exactly like the man depicted in the painting.

ANCESTOR: Manfred.

The portrait returns to normal.

ISABELLA: Hark, my lord! What sound was that?

With a third flash of lightning and crash of thunder, the ANCESTOR appears again from behind the portrait.

ANCESTOR: Manfred.

MANFRED lets go of ISABELLA.

ISABELLA: Terrors, horrors, and abominations!

ISABELLA flees out the door. The portrait swings open, and the ANCESTOR walks out into the room.

MANFRED: Do I dream? Or are the devils themselves in league against me? Speak, infernal specter! Or, if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against me, who too dearly pays for - -

ANCESTOR: *(Motioning for him to follow.)* - - Manfred.

MANFRED: Lead on! I will follow thee to the gulf of perdition! (*The ANCESTOR goes out through the door. MANFRED follows him, but the door slams in his face. He tries to open it, but it is locked. A demonic laugh permeates the room.*) Since hell will not satisfy me, I will use all the human means in my power for preserving my race. Isabella shall not escape me.

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE:

A dreary underground passage. A shaft of light shines in from the top of the cavern. ISABELLA enters cautiously. THEODORE emerges from the shadows, and ISABELLA shrieks.

THEODORE: Be not alarmed, lady

ISABELLA: Sir, whoever you are, take pity on a wretched princess! Assist me to escape from this fatal castle, or I may be made miserable forever!

THEODORE: I will die in your defense, but I am unacquainted with the castle.

ISABELLA: Oh! Help me but to find a trapdoor, and it is the greatest service you can do me, for I have not a minute to lose.

ISABELLA gets down on her hands and knees, and THEODORE does the same.

THEODORE: What are we looking for?

ISABELLA: A smooth piece of brass enclosed in one of the stones. If we can find that, I may escape. If not, alas! Courteous stranger, I fear I shall have involved you in my misfortunes. Manfred will suspect you for the accomplice of my flight.

THEODORE: I value not my life, and it will be some comfort to lose it in trying to deliver you from his tyranny.

ISABELLA: Gentle youth! How shall I ever requite - - (*Seeing the trapdoor.*) Oh, transport! Here is the trapdoor! (*ISABELLA takes out a key and unlocks the door. She pulls up an iron ring.*) Lift up the door. (*THEODORE obeys, and ISABELLA crawls down into the trapdoor.*) Follow me. Dark and dismal as it is, we cannot miss our way. It leads directly to the church of St. Nicholas. Only let me know, to whom am I so much obliged?

MANFRED: (*Offstage.*) Talk not to me of necromancers! She must be in the castle.

ISABELLA: Oh, heavens! The voice of Manfred! Make haste, or we are ruined!

ISABELLA descends below. THEODORE is about to follow her, when he accidentally lets the trapdoor fall shut. THEODORE tries to re-open the door, but it is locked.

MANFRED: (*Offstage.*) It must be Isabella. She is escaping by the subterraneous passage.

THEODORE: (*Knocking on the trapdoor.*) Hello? Princess. Hello?

Enter MANFRED with GUARDS.

MANFRED: Traitor! How camest thou here? I thought thee imprisoned.

THEODORE: I am no traitor, nor am I answerable for your thought.

MANFRED: Presumptuous villain! Tell me, how hast thou escaped from above - - thou hast corrupted thy guards and their lives shall answer it.

THEODORE: My poverty will exculpate them.

MANFRED: Tortures shall force the truth from thee. Tell me! I will know thy accomplices.

THEODORE: (*Pointing up.*) There was my accomplice! That gap opened up when the helmet fell. Your guards did not notice it when you imprisoned me. I squeezed through the crack, and only just a while ago was able to climb down.

MANFRED: Was that the way which thou didst descend?

THEODORE: It was.

MANFRED: But what noise was that I heard as I entered the cloister?

THEODORE: A door clapped. I heard it as well as you.

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MANFRED: What door?

THEODORE: I am not acquainted with your castle.

MANFRED: But I tell thee, it was this way I heard the noise. My servants heard it too.

GUARD 1: My lord, to be sure it was the trapdoor, and he was going to make his escape.

MANFRED: (*Striking the guard on the head.*) Peace, blockhead! I will know from his own mouth. Tell me truly! Thy life depends on thy veracity.

THEODORE: My veracity is dearer to me than my life. Ask me what I can say in truth, and then put me to death if I tell you a lie.

MANFRED: Well then, thou man of truth, answer: was it the trapdoor I heard?

THEODORE: It was.

MANFRED: It was! And how didst thou know there was a trapdoor?

THEODORE: I saw the plate of brass by a gleam of moon.

MANFRED: But what told thee it was a lock?

THEODORE: Providence, that delivered me, was able to help me spring the lock.

MANFRED: Providence should have gone farther, and placed thee out of reach of my resentment. When Providence had brought thee to the lock, it left thee for a fool who did not know how to make use of its favors. Why didst thou shut the door before thou hadst descended the steps?

THEODORE: I might ask you, my lord, how I, totally unacquainted with your castle, was to know that those steps led to any outlet? But I scorn to evade your questions. The truth is, I let the trapdoor fall. Your immediate arrival followed.

MANFRED: Thou art a resolute villain. Thou hast not told me yet how thou didst open the lock?

THEODORE: That I will show you, my lord. (*THEODORE gets down on his hands and knees. He taps on the door with a stone and fiddles with the lock, all obviously in an attempt to gain time.*) Umm . . . just one moment.

JAQUEZ: (*Offstage.*) Where is my lord? Where is my prince?

MANFRED: Here I am, have you found the princess?

DIEGO: (*Entering.*) Oh! My lord! I am glad we have found you!

Enter JAQUEZ trailing behind.

MANFRED: Found me! Have you found the princess?

JAQUEZ: We thought we had, my lord, but - -

MANFRED: But what? Has she escaped?

DIEGO: Jaquez and I, my lord - -

JAQUEZ: - - Yes, I and Diego - -

MANFRED: - - Speak one of you at a time! I ask you, where is the princess?

BOTH: We do not know!

DIEGO: But we are frightened out of our wits!

MANFRED: So I think, blockheads. What is it has scared you thus?

JAQUEZ: Oh! My lord, Diego has seen such a sight! Your highness would not believe your eyes - -

MANFRED: - - Give me a direct answer, or by heaven - -

JAQUEZ: - - Why, my lord, if it please your highness to hear me, Diego and I - -

DIEGO: - - Yes, I and Jaquez - -

MANFRED: - - Did not I forbid you to speak both at a time? (*Pushes DIEGO to the side.*) You, Jaquez, answer, for the other fool seems more distracted than thou art. What is the matter?

JAQUEZ: My gracious lord, if it please your highness to hear me. Diego and I, according to your highness' orders, went to search for the young lady, but being apprehensive that we might meet the ghost of my young lord, your highness' son - -

MANFRED: - - Sot! Is it only a ghost, then, that thou hast seen?

DIEGO: Oh! Worse! Worse, my lord! I had rather have seen ten whole ghosts.

MANFRED: Out of my sight, Diego! (*DIEGO walks to the side of the stage and pouts.*) And thou, Jaquez, tell me, in one word, art thou sober? Art thou raving? Thou wast wont to have some sense; has the other sot frightened himself and thee too? Speak, what is it he fancies he has seen?

JAQUEZ: (*Trembling.*) Why, my lord, I was going to tell your highness that since the calamitous misfortune of my young lord, God rest his precious soul, not one of us, your highness's faithful servants - - indeed we are, my lord, though poor men - - I say, not one of us has dared to set a foot about the castle but two together. So, Diego and I, thinking that my young lady might be in the great gallery, went up there to look for her.

MANFRED: O blundering fools! She left me in the gallery. I came from thence myself.

JAQUEZ: For all that, she may be there still, for aught I know, but the devil shall have me before I seek her there again - - poor Diego! I do not believe he will ever recover it!

MANFRED: Recover what? Am I never to learn what it is has terrified these rascals? Follow me, slave. I will see if she is in the gallery.

JAQUEZ: For heaven's sake, my dear good lord, do not go to the gallery! Satan himself, I believe, is in the chamber next to the gallery.

MANFRED: What is in the great chamber?

JAQUEZ: My lord, when Diego and I came into the gallery - - he went first, for he said he had more courage than I - - So, when we came into the gallery, we found - - nobody. We looked under every bench and stool, and still we found - - nobody.

MANFRED: Were all the pictures in their places?

JAQUEZ: Yes, my lord.

MANFRED: Well, well, proceed.

JAQUEZ: When we came to the door of the great chamber, we found it shut.

MANFRED: And could you not open it?

JAQUEZ: Oh yes, my lord, would to heaven we had not. Nay, it was not I neither, it was Diego. He was grown foolhardy, and would go on, though I advised him not - - if ever I open a door that is shut again!

MANFRED: Trifle not, but tell me what you saw.

JAQUEZ: I, my lord! I saw - - nothing. I was behind Diego. But I heard the noise.

MANFRED: (*Grabbing him by the shoulders.*) Jaquez, tell me, I adjure thee by the souls of my ancestors, what was it thou sawest?

JAQUEZ: It was Diego saw it, my lord. I only heard the noise. Diego had no sooner opened the door than he cried out and ran back - - I ran back too, and said, "Is it the ghost?" "The ghost! No, no," said Diego. (*JAQUEZ falls to his knees and grabs MANFRED around the waist in fright.*) It is a giant, I believe. He is all clad in armor, for I saw his foot and part of his leg, and they are as large as the helmet below in the court." As he said these words, my lord, we heard the rattling of armor. Before we could get to the end of the gallery, we heard the door of the great chamber clap behind us, but we did not dare turn back. But for heaven's sake, good my lord, send for the chaplain and have the castle exorcised!

GUARD 2: Aye, pray do, my lord, or we must leave your highness' service.

MANFRED: Peace, dotards! And follow me. I will know what all this means.

GUARDS: We, my lord!

GUARD 1: We would not go up to the gallery for all your highness's revenue.

THEODORE: Will your highness permit me to try this adventure? My life is of consequence to nobody. I fear no bad angel and have offended no good one.

MANFRED: Your behavior is above your seeming. Hereafter I will reward your bravery - - but now, I am so circumstanced that I dare trust no eyes but my own - - however, I give you leave to accompany me.

Exit ALL.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT RISE:

MATILDA's bedroom. BIANCA is helping MATILDA prepare for going to bed, combing her hair.

MATILDA: But what business could he have so urgent with the chaplain? Does he intend to have my brother's body interred privately in the chapel?

BIANCA: Oh! Madam, now I guess. As you have become his heiress, he is impatient to have you married; he has always been raving for more sons, I warrant he is now impatient for grandsons. As sure as I live, madam, I shall see you a bride at last - - Good madam, you won't cast off your faithful Bianca! You won't put Donna Rosara over me now you are a great princess!

MATILDA: My poor Bianca, how fast your thoughts amble! I, a great princess! What hast thou seen in Manfred's behavior since my brother's death that bespeaks any increase of tenderness to me - - but he is my father, and I must not complain. Nay, if heaven shuts my father's heart against me, it overpays my little merit in the tenderness of my mother. O, that dear mother! Yes, Bianca, 'tis there I feel the rugged temper of Manfred.

BIANCA: Oh madam, all men use their wives so when they are weary of them.

MATILDA: And yet you congratulated me just now when you fancied my father intended to dispose of me in marriage!

BIANCA: I do not wish to see you locked in a convent, as you would be if you had your will - - *(A noise.)* - - Bless me! What noise was that! St. Nicholas forgive me! I was but in jest.

MATILDA: It is the wind, whistling through the battlements. You have heard it a thousand times.

BIANCA: Nay, there was no harm in what I said. It is no sin to talk of matrimony - - and so, madam, as I was saying, if my lord Manfred should offer you a handsome young prince for a bridegroom, you would drop him a curtesy and tell him you would rather take the veil.

MATILDA: *(Taking the comb away from BIANCA.)* Thank heaven I am in no such danger. You know how many proposals for me he has rejected.

BIANCA: And you thank him like a dutiful daughter, do you, madam? But come, madam, suppose tomorrow morning he was to send for you to the great council chamber, and there you should find at his elbow a lovely young prince with large black eyes, a smooth white forehead, and manly curling locks like jet. In short, madam, a young hero resembling the picture of the good Alfonso in the gallery.

MATILDA: Do not speak lightly of that picture. I know the adoration with which I look is uncommon - - but I am not in love with a colored panel. It is not merely his manly curling locks of jet which inspire my devotion - - though they are nice. The character of that virtuous prince, the veneration with which my mother has inspired me for his memory, the orisons which she has enjoined me to pour forth at his tomb, all have concurred to persuade me that somehow or other, my destiny is linked with something relating to him.

BIANCA: Lord, madam! How should that be? I have heard that your family was in no way related to his, and I am sure I cannot conceive why my lady, the princess Hippolita, sends you in a cold morning or a damp evening to pray at his tomb. He is no saint by the almanac. If you must pray, why does she not bid you address yourself to our great St. Nicholas? I am sure he is the saint to pray to for a husband.

MATILDA: Perhaps my mind would be less affected if my mother would explain her reasons to me. But it is the mystery she observes that inspires me with this - - I know not what to call it. I am sure there is some fatal secret at bottom - - nay, I know there is. In her agony of grief for my brother's death she dropped some words that - -

BIANCA: - - Oh, dear madam! What were they?

MATILDA: No. If a parent lets fall a word and wishes it recalled, it is not for a child to utter it.

BIANCA: I am sure, madam, you may trust me.

MATILDA: With my own secrets, when I have any, I may, but never with my mother's. A child ought to have no ears or eyes but as a parent directs.

BIANCA takes back the comb.

BIANCA: Well, to be sure, madam, you were born to be a saint, and there is no resisting one's vocation. You will end in a convent at last. (*Combing her own hair.*) But my lady Isabella would not be so reserved to me. She will let me talk to her of young men, and when a handsome cavalier has come to the castle, she has owned to me that she wished your brother Conrad resembled him.

MATILDA: Bianca, I do not allow you to mention my friend disrespectfully. Isabella's soul is as pure as virtue itself. She knows your idle babbling humor and perhaps has now and then encouraged it to enliven the solitude in which my father - -

A noise.

BIANCA: - - Blessed Mary, there it goes again! Dear madam, do you hear nothing? This castle is certainly haunted!

MATILDA: Peace! And listen! I did think I heard a voice - - but it must be fancy. Your terrors, I suppose, have infected me.

BIANCA: Indeed! Indeed! Madam, I am sure I heard a voice!

MATILDA: Does nobody lie in the chamber beneath?

BIANCA: Nobody has dared to lie there since the great astrologer that was your brother's tutor drowned himself. For certain, madam, his ghost and the young prince's are now met in the chamber below - - for heaven's sake, let us fly to your mother!

MATILDA: I charge you not to stir. If they are spirits in pain, we may ease their sufferings by questioning them. And if they mean us harm, shall we be more safe in one chamber than another? Reach me my beads. We will say a prayer and then speak to them.

BIANCA: Oh dear lady, I would not speak to a ghost for the world!

THEODORE pops his head up through the trapdoor.

THEODORE: Now, I wonder what part of the castle - -

BIANCA screams, and slams the trapdoor on his head. MATILDA holds it open just enough so that THEODORE can barely peek in.

MATILDA: Who is it?

THEODORE: A stranger.

MATILDA: What stranger?

THEODORE: One with a cracked head.

MATILDA: And how didst thou come here at this unusual hour when all the gates of the castle were locked?

THEODORE: I am not here willingly. Those gates you mentioned serve to lock me in, not out. I went with my lord Manfred to the gallery and then, as he was ranting and railing against his servants, I escaped through a narrow passage behind a tapestry. I'm afraid I've gotten quite lost in these passages. Excuse me, but I've been crawling around in the dark on my hands and knees for several hours now, do you think that you could let me out of here?

BIANCA: Into a lady's bedroom! Why certainly not!

THEODORE: I am sorry. I knew not that it was a bedroom. I will go now.

THEODORE ducks his head down.

MATILDA: No! (*MATILDA starts to open the trap-door, then closes it, not wanting the stranger to leave but not wanting him to enter, either. THEODORE pops his head back up when he hears her cry, and she whacks him on the head a second time with the trapdoor.*) Thy words and accents are of a melancholy cast. If thou art unhappy, I pity thee. If poverty afflicts thee, let me know. I will mention thee to the princess, whose beneficent soul ever melts for the distressed, and she will relieve thee.

THEODORE: I am indeed distressed, but it is not for lack of wealth that I do sigh - - yet think me not proud or that I disdain your generous offers! I will remember you in my orisons, and I will pray for blessings on your gracious self and your noble mistress.

BIANCA: (*Whispering.*) Now I have it, madam! Let us sift him. He does not know you but takes you for one of my lady Hippolita's women.

MATILDA: Art thou not ashamed, Bianca! What right have we to pry into the secrets of this young man's heart?

BIANCA: Lord, madam, how little you know of love! Why, lovers have no pleasure equal to talking of their mistress!

MATILDA: And would you have me become a peasant's confidant?

BIANCA: Well, then, let me talk to him. Though I have the honor of being your highness's maid, I was not always so great. Besides, I have a respect for a young man in love.

MATILDA: Peace, simpleton! Though he said he was unhappy, it does not follow that he must be in love.

BIANCA: But he sighs, madam! Besides, I have never known a young man to be unhappy when a woman was not involved.

MATILDA: (*Bending down to the trapdoor.*) Stranger, if thy misfortunes are within the compass of the princess Hippolita's power to redress, I will take upon me to answer that she will be thy protectress. When thou art dismissed from this castle, repair to holy Father Jerome at the convent adjoining to the church of St. Nicholas and make thy story known to him. He will not fail to inform the princess. Farewell. It is not seemly for me to hold further converse with a man at this unwonted hour.

MATILDA slams the trapdoor down on THEODORE.

THEODORE: Wait!

MATILDA: Yes?

THEODORE: If a poor and worthless stranger might presume to beg a minute's audience farther - -

MATILDA: - - Speak quickly. What wouldst thou ask?

THEODORE: I know not how - - I know not if I dare, yet the humanity with which you have spoken to me emboldens - - lady, dare I trust you?

MATILDA: Speak boldly, if thy secret is fit to be entrusted to a virtuous breast.

THEODORE: I would ask whether what I have heard is true, that the princess is missing from the castle?

MATILDA: What imports it to thee to know? Dost thou come hither to pry into the secrets of Manfred? Adieu. I have been mistaken in thee.

MATILDA slams the trapdoor shut on his head before THEODORE has a chance to respond.

BIANCA: It is not fit for me to argue with your highness, but perhaps the questions I should have put to him would have been more to the purpose than those you have been pleased to ask him.

MATILDA: Oh, no doubt! May I know what you would have asked him?

BIANCA: Does your highness think, madam, that his question about my Lady Isabella was the result of mere curiosity? Lopez told me that all the servants believe a young fellow contrived my Lady Isabella's escape. Now pray, madam, observe - - you and I both know that my Lady Isabella never much fancied the prince, your brother - - well! He is killed just in the critical minute - - I accuse nobody. A helmet falls from the moon - - so my lord, your father, says. But Lopez and all the servants say that this young spark is a magician and stole it from Alfonso's tomb.

MATILDA: Have done with this rhapsody of impertinence. Dare not, on thy duty, to breath a suspicion on the purity of my dear Isabella's fame.

BIANCA: Purity or no purity, she's gone.

MATILDA: (*Sitting down.*) Whatever the cause of Isabella's flight, it had no unworthy motive. If this stranger was accessory to it, she must be satisfied of his fidelity and worth. I observed, did not you, Bianca, that his words were tintured with an uncommon infusion of piety. It was no ruffian's speech. His phrases become a man of birth.

BIANCA: If he could get out from under the helmet, it should be no surprise that he can speak finely. I do not doubt he has some talisman or other about him.

MATILDA: You resolve everything into magic. But a man who has any course with infernal spirits does not dare to make use of those tremendous and holy words. Didst thou not observe with what fervor he vowed to remember me to heaven in his prayers? Yes, Isabella was undoubtedly convinced of his piety.

BIANCA: Commend me to the piety of a young fellow and a damsel!

MATILDA: No, Bianca, you obviously did not see his noble face.

BIANCA: You saw him?

MATILDA: I caught a glimpse.

BIANCA: Well, what did he look like?

MATILDA: He is a lovely young man with large black eyes, a smooth white forehead, and manly curling locks like jet!

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

AT RISE:

The next day. A room in the castle. Enter MANFRED and HIPPOLITA, attended on one side, and FATHER JEROME with a guard on the other.

MANFRED: Now tell me, Father Jerome, is your business with me or the princess Hippolita?

FATHER JEROME: With both. The Lady Isabella - -

MANFRED: - - What of her?

FATHER JEROME: Is at St. Nicholas's altar.

MANFRED: That is no business of Hippolita! Let us retire to my chamber, Father, and inform me how she came thither.

FATHER JEROME: No, my lord, my commission is to both. And, with your highness's good liking, in the presence of both I shall deliver it. My lady, are you acquainted with the cause of the Lady Isabella's retirement from your castle?

HIPPOLITA: No, on my soul. Does Isabella charge me with being privy to it?

MANFRED: Father, I pay due reverence to your holy profession, but I am sovereign here and will allow no meddling priest to interfere in the affairs of my household.

FATHER JEROME: I know my duty and am the minister of a mightier Prince than Manfred. Harken to Him, who speaks through my lowly self. (*MANFRED folds his arms and sighs.*) The Lady Isabella commends herself to both your highnesses. She deplores the loss of your son and her own misfortune in not becoming the daughter of such wise and noble princes. But, as it is no longer possible to be allied to you, she entreats your consent to remain in sanctuary.

MANFRED: I shall give no consent, but insist on her return to the castle.

FATHER JEROME: Your highness will recollect whether that can any longer be proper.

MANFRED: I want no monitor. Isabella's conduct leaves room for strange suspicions - - and that young villain, who was at least accomplice of her flight if not the cause of it - -

FATHER JEROME: - - The cause! Was a young man the cause?

MANFRED: This is not to be borne! Am I to be bearded in my own palace by an insolent monk? Thou art privy, I guess, to their amours

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FATHER JEROME: - - I would pray to heaven to clear up your uncharitable surmises.

MANFRED: Cant not to me, but return and bring the princess to her duty.

FATHER JEROME: It is my duty to prevent her return. She is where orphans and virgins are safest from the snares and wiles of the world, and nothing but a parent's authority shall take her thence.

MANFRED: I am her parent and demand her.

FATHER JEROME: She wished to have you as her parent, but heaven and a giant helmet forbade that connection, and they have forever dissolved all ties betwixt you. And I announce to your highness - -

MANFRED: - - Stop, audacious man! And dread my displeasure.

HIPPOLITA: Holy father, it is your office to be no respecter of great personages. But it is my duty to hear nothing that it pleases not my lord I should hear. Attend the prince here. I will retire to my oratory and pray the blessed virgin to inspire you with her holy counsels.

FATHER JEROME: Excellent woman! My lord, I attend your pleasure.

Exit HIPPOLITA. MANFRED dismisses the GUARDS.

MANFRED: I perceive, Father, that Isabella has acquainted you with my purpose. Now, hear my resolve and obey. Reasons of state, most urgent reasons, demand that I should have a son. It is vain to expect an heir from Hippolita. I have made choice of Isabella. You must bring her back. And you must do more. I know the influence you have with Hippolita. Her soul is set on heaven and scorns the little grandeur of this world. Persuade her to consent to the dissolution of our marriage and retire into a convent. She shall endow one if she will and shall have the means of being as liberal to your order as she or you can wish.

FATHER JEROME: The injuries of the virtuous Hippolita have mounted to the throne of pity. (*Striking MANFRED.*) By me thou art reprimanded for thy adulterous intention. (*Striking MANFRED again.*) By me thou art warned not to pursue thine incestuous design on thy contracted daughter. (*Grabs MANFRED by the head and forces him to look upward.*) Heaven, that delivered her from your fury, will continue to watch over her. But yester-morn whose house was so great, so flourishing as Manfred's? Where is young Conrad now! Crushed! (*Pushes MANFRED to the ground.*) Under the gigantic weight of a supernatural helmet! (*MANFRED starts to cry.*) My lord, I respect your tears, but I mean not to check them. Let them flow, prince. They will weigh more with heaven toward the welfare of thy subjects than a marriage, which could never prosper. If it is the will of the Most High that Manfred's name must perish, resign yourself, my lord, to its decrees and thus deserve a crown that can never pass away.

MANFRED kicks FATHER JEROME.

MANFRED: Father, I honor Hippolita's virtues. I think her a saint, and wish it were for my soul's health to tie faster the knot that has united us - - but alas! Father, you know not the bitterest of my pangs. It is some time that I have had scruples on the legality of our union. Hippolita is related to me - - in the fourth degree. Yes! She is my uncle's third cousin once removed!

FATHER JEROME: Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

MANFRED: It is true, we had a dispensation, but I have been informed that she had also been contracted to another. To my father's cousin's hunting partner nonetheless!

FATHER JEROME: Oh, the horror!

MANFRED: This it is that sits heavy on my heart. To this state of unlawful wedlock I impute the visitation that has fallen on me in the death of Conrad! Ease my conscience of this burden. Dissolve our marriage and accomplish the work of godliness which your divine exhortations have commenced in my soul.

FATHER JEROME: My lord, I have been pondering on what your highness has said, and if, in truth, it is delicacy of conscience that is the real motive of your repugnance to your virtuous lady, far be it from me to endeavor to harden your heart. The church alone can administer comfort to your soul, either by satisfying your conscience, or upon examination of your scruples, by setting you at liberty and indulging you in the lawful means of continuing your lineage. In the latter case, if the Lady Isabella can be brought to consent - -

MANFRED: - - Oh, she will! She will! Since now we understand one another, I expect, Father, that you satisfy me in one point. Who is the youth that I found in the vault? He must have been privy to Isabella's flight. Tell me truly, is he her lover?

FATHER JEROME: I suppose that there could be some connection.

MANFRED: I will fathom to the bottom of this intrigue. Lopez!

LOPEZ: (*Entering.*) Aye, my lord?

MANFRED: Bring in that traitorous villain who escaped from me once but was found sneaking through the secret passageways of the castle.

LOPEZ: Aye, my lord.

Exit LOPEZ.

MANFRED: Stay, Father, you shall soon see the loathsome face of Isabella's paramour. (*Enter THEODORE, guarded.*) Thou hardened young impostor! What becomes of thy boasted veracity now? It was Providence, was it, and the light of the moon that discovered the lock of the trapdoor to thee? Was it also Providence and the moon who showed you the secret passageway behind the tapestry in the gallery?

THEODORE: No, my lord, that was my own two eyes.

MANFRED: Tell me, audacious boy, who thou art and how long thou hast been acquainted with the princess - - and take care to answer without equivocation, or tortures shall wring the truth from thee.

THEODORE: I am no impostor, my lord, nor have I deserved your harsh language. I answered every question your highness put to me before with the same veracity that I shall speak now. Repeat your questions, my lord. I am ready to give you all the satisfaction in my power.

MANFRED: Speak directly, who art thou, and how long hast thou been known to the princess?

THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

THEODORE: I am a laborer in the next village. My name is Theodore. The princess found me in the vault. Before that hour, I never was in her presence.

MANFRED: Tell me what reason did the princess give thee for making her escape? Thy life depends on thy answer.

THEODORE: She told me that she was on the brink of destruction, and that if she could not escape from the castle, she was in danger, in a few moments, of being made miserable forever.

MANFRED: And on this slight foundation, on a silly girl's report, thou didst hazard my displeasure?

THEODORE: I fear no man's displeasure when a woman is in distress.

Enter MATILDA and BIANCA.

MATILDA: Heavens, Bianca! Do I dream? Or is not that youth the exact resemblance of Alfonso's picture in the gallery?

MANFRED: This surpasses all thy former insolence. Thou shalt experience the wrath with which thou dardest to trifle. Seize him and bind him! The first news the princess hears of her champion shall be that he has lost his head!

MATILDA: No!

MATILDA swoons.

BIANCA: Help! Help! The princess is dead!

MANFRED AND THEODORE: WHAT?

BIANCA: She SWOONS!

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