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CEZIA BORGIA

A DRAMA

HONDY S. SALZBURG

DOVERANCE



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1922

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LUCREZIA BORGIA

A DRAMA

By

SIDNEY S. SALZBURG



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no 1

DEDICATED TO MY WIFE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ALFONSO, Duke of Ferrara

PIETRO BEMBO

ERCOLE STROZZI

COURT JESTER

HUNTSMEN and

SERVANTS

CITIZENS OF FERRARA

LUCREZIA BORGIA, Duchess of Ferrara

ANGELA BORGIA, cousin

BARBARA TORELLI, wife of Ercole Strozzi

LUCREZIA BORGIA

ACT I

SCENE 1. Ferrara, Italy. 1508 A. D. Outskirts of Ferrara. Woods. Whistling, bugle calls and hallooing are heard in the distance. Enter huntsmen.

CHIEF HUNTSMAN

Heigh, ho! Heigh, ho! What a chill! The air, shot through with the warming rays of the sun, is sucking all the dew off the fields. Only in the forest upon the network of twigs and branches, glisten stray beads of moisture, waiting to disappear with the progress of day. The ground, sallow and soaked, is hardening beneath the hoofs of our steeds, and the sky is melting its leaden cast in the face of the sun.

FIRST HUNTSMAN

We courted day with the dawn, and have traversed the width of the forest for sport to appease the Duke's indisposition.

SECOND HUNTSMAN

These past days the Duke has galloped at a faster pace, his steed more impatient than ever, and more ferociously the Duke attacks his prey. His spear strikes unerringly and the boar lies helpless even before his approach.

THIRD HUNTSMAN

Indeed! This early morn would have been my last were not the Duke behind me. My javelin was cast and still the boar pressed close, his eyes, stricken with pain, glowering upon me, and I felt the nausea of approaching death, when, lightning-struck, the huge beast collapsed at my side. The Duke's spear had pierced between his eyes!

CHIEF HUNTSMAN

It is true the Duke has acted strangely these past days, though our sire was always valiant and stout of heart. He has called us each day of all seven to his service, and though it is our duty to obey, his custom was never to hunt more than thrice a week.

FIRST HUNTSMAN

Often he droops his arms when alone, relaxes

into pensive reverie, and rides on at the guidance of his steed.

SECOND HUNTSMAN

And how he suddenly starts, awakened, and spurs on madly, the horse exulting in its own steel muscles, displaying its pranks.

THIRD HUNTSMAN

Ho, ho! Ho, ho! here comes our gallant fool—the jester!

ALL HUNTSMEN

Ho! Ho! the fool!

COURT JESTER

Ho ho yourselves, wise owls. You stink of the foul stenching woods.

CHIEF HUNTSMAN

It being our profession to be of the woods we know not our own odor, but none of us being fools we know that you are one—and a poor one.

THIRD HUNTSMAN

And he reeks even worse! The perfume he poured upon himself, in haste to meet the Duke's

unprecedented summons his consort to be, has not yet evaporated. Ha, ha, ha, a fine sight you, dolled to perfection and dragged through the mire of the woods.

COURT JESTER

At least perfect in my art, but you? Your knees trembled and you sagged to the ground with fear when that boar pressed close. A fine huntsman, you!

ALL HUNTSMEN

Hey, hey!

COURT JESTER

Your life was of little worth then. The beast's blood rebaptized you. And now, you are a good Christian once more!

SECOND HUNTSMAN

Hey, hey! fool, you speak sacrilegiously.

COURT JESTER

What? of the boar or of this braggart?

ALL HUNTSMEN

Hey, hey, hey! Let us rub his face in the mud.

[*They seize him and lift him above their heads when the Duke enters.*]

DUKE

Hold, hold there, you fools! what play is this?

COURT JESTER

[*Lifted high*] It is an insult to the lighter side of your majesty, master!

FIRST HUNTSMAN

You are heavy enough, fool. [*They relinquish their hold.*]

THIRD HUNTSMAN

This fool spoke sacrilegiously, sire.

DUKE

How so?

THIRD HUNTSMAN

The boar you slew, thus indebted me more than ever before, was a source of ridicule to him. He said its blood spilled, rebaptized me, to make a good Christian of me once more!

DUKE

Ha, ha, ha! Gentlemen, he has already sinned against his own goddess of wit. Why inflict more torture on him?

COURT JESTER

In penitence whereof I make a wry face.

CHIEF HUNTSMAN

Most becoming!

DUKE

Gentlemen! You may go, we shall call this a day. I will follow soon and join you at the venison. [*Exit huntsmen. Seats himself, his hands supporting his head.*] Why has this thought pursued me, fool, now and never before? There must be truth in it. The days are longer, never well spent. The nights are sleepless. I seek refuge and find none. The more I cower from it, the greater its proportions. I seek to obliterate it and it comes back. I recall moments of the past and scoff at my present suspicions, and still they rise, more justifiable. I see innocence here and innocence there, and yet my mind perceives duplicity. This shadow that has crossed my mind has left me restless. There is that which has

taken me out of the routine of my life—has made me think different from all other days. Fool! What is happiness?

COURT JESTER

Happiness? Happiness is a moment of forgetfulness.

DUKE

What then would be unhappiness?

COURT JESTER

Ah! that is a moment of realization.

DUKE

So I thought! I am unhappy, fool, although I have not realized anything. . . .yet.

COURT JESTER

You are looking for it then; you will surely find it.

DUKE

You do not know anything?—about Ercole Strozzi?

COURT JESTER

The poet you mean? Nothing, except that he has dedicated all his poems to the Duchess,

which is strange, all people of Ferrara holding up his love for his own beautiful wife, Barbara, as exemplary. It is rumored though, that his ambition is to be cardinal, and thus perhaps he thought to gain his end. The peasants are in sympathy with this, he being such a worthy citizen.—But he is unworthy of your steel, master, and does not deserve a moment's thought.—The sun is rising steadily in the heavens and we have not yet broken our fast today. We may miss the feed.

DUKE

Aye, the Duchess has asked this favor, to grant Ercole Strozzi the red hat—Fool! Your only care is your hungry pit, thus swelling you the wronger way.

COURT JESTER

And yours the court and its jealousies, thus thinning you—

DUKE

[*Rises*] Fool!

COURT JESTER

[*Smacking lips*] Now we go—

DUKE

[*Sits again*] But, there is something. I cannot understand her—there is a change.

COURT JESTER

Damn those poets! They live on song and love, and get aches of the heart, but I—I must have red meat and enjoy real aches of the pit.

DUKE

They win their ladies so, fool! But I, what do I gain, but provocation?

COURT JESTER

Something gained!

DUKE

Fool! [*Shoves him to far end, and then walks out. The Court Jester follows, singing:*]

The boar is dead,
Long live the Duke!
The Duke sees red,
Beware!—Now I'll be fed!

Curtain

SCENE 2. Lucrezia's private room.

LUCREZIA

The skies of Rome are darkling over fair Ferrara, and my mind perceives its inclinations. The past brings up its dregs! Plague upon you! I fled, methought, to a convent of marriage where one would learn a woman's happiness; and thus several years I did content myself. And now, the pallor of desire creeps over my cheeks and with it the flush of connivance, that which I learned well amongst my own. But Cesar, noble brother slain of late, never knew this mirrored self, nor the Pope, my father, ever succumbed to it, except to his own poison. Only Gandia—he was of gentle blood and because of that was he a victim of his own brother's plottings—and mine! But the past is dead and it cannot spit out its secrets—only the present must not gargle out its own. Already have I contrived to well hide his name, him, upon whom I could pour all my affections, oh, my very self. Upon his friend has fallen the Duke's eyes with suspicion,—so my servant, spying, has informed me. That is well. I can love in secret, and if need be, work in it too! [*Enter Duke*] Alfonso!

DUKE

Aye, it is I.

LUCREZIA

This past while have I not seen you but rarely. In early morn you hunt, and at noon you dine with your men, in the eve—I know not what is passing so between us that you keep so distant—and now that you are here—you would greet me otherwise—

DUKE

[*Kisses her*] Aye, if it were not that you have become the very core of myself, my proudest possession—I would be different.

LUCREZIA

And why speak so?

DUKE

I know not. But it is you, I fear, who is at fault. Every mood of yours reflects itself upon me. Yes, Lucrezia, you have been different of late.

LUCREZIA

A pretty state it is. You say it is I, I say it is you. Now who is right?

DUKE

I cannot be wrong. Have we not been happy these past years? Have I not always been at your call? Have I not fulfilled your every whim?

LUCREZIA

And how cannot you be wrong?

DUKE

Because I am of Ferrara, Lucrezia, and you are of Rome. These years I thought you learned our customs, perceived the happiness amongst our peasantry, our people, our court. I rejoiced in that you flung away your environment, that which I had feared before marriage and of which I had spoken to my father, but my father thought different. A woman, he said, sprouts according to the soil she is on, it is easy to transplant her.

LUCREZIA

Sire, your words bear a sting. If, as you say, I know not your simplicity, then you know not Roman glory, Roman luxury. The coffers of your state were quadrupled in our marriage—that, perhaps, you know. Of its splendour, you know nothing.

DUKE

Nor of its wicked life. Naught of its papacy, of
brother slaying brother, of sister—

LUCREZIA

You hesitate? Why not speak out and give full
way to your blast? Transplant! I am no slen-
der reed blowing with the wind.

DUKE

What I fear! Not you were transplanted but
Roman ways.

LUCREZIA

And why all this venom?

DUKE

Because you have some gallant behind my back.

LUCREZIA

Indeed! Who, pray?

DUKE

Some fool poet who does not fear my sword,
but—

LUCREZIA

Perhaps you mean—Pietro Bembo?

DUKE

No! Pietro? He is one of the faithful of my court. I mean him for whom you petitioned to grant the red hat.

LUCREZIA

Ercole Strozzi!

DUKE

Yes, him, who dedicates his ditties to you, and you, who in return, wish to elevate him.

LUCREZIA

Interesting!

DUKE

You sit there calmly, undisturbed, and glibly say—interesting. You do not deny it. You—I—I—I shall show you who is master here—I—I—
[*Exit Duke.*]

LUCREZIA

This much done. It is firm in his mind. [*Enter Angela.*] Cousin!

ANGELA

Regards I bear and even more. He waits impatient to see you.

LUCREZIA

Poor lover! that our bliss be denied even one moment of time, and this because of the Duke.

ANGELA

He asks if he cannot be with you this eve.

LUCREZIA

This eve? Ercole and his wife are to visit us. Let him come. Does not Time cheat itself in one sweet moment?

ANGELA

This then ends my message with your reply, and with it I wash my hands of the affair.

LUCREZIA

Cousin, what is this?

ANGELA

Nay, Lucrezia, I will not bear the face of this any longer.

LUCREZIA

And you promised to be of help?

ANGELA

I did. But I did not promise to be accomplice to intrigue.

LUCREZIA

What insubordination!

ANGELA

Nay, mistress, insubordination if I had not learned of the Duke's false suspicions upon an innocent man. It was my desire to aid my cousin in her own desire in love. That was all I promised, so I swear by the Holy Virgin.

LUCREZIA

And by the Holy Virgin you swore that Pietro would be my lover. No one else in this court have I, but you of the blood of Borgia. Now your help I need more than ever. I am already steeped in this to gain my love—you cannot draw back any more than I.

ANGELA

This is not Rome, Lucrezia! One word to the Duke and you and Pietro Bembo are undone.

LUCREZIA

You threaten me!

ANGELA

Nay, forbid the thought. Only this, that were I in Rome now I could do naught else but obey, despite my own reckonings. Here the bonds of blood are severed.

LUCREZIA

A traitor to the name of Borgia!

ANGELA

Aye, one who at last can find refuge from its stain. Think twice before you proceed with your plans, Lucrezia, for without them I know you cannot be. Ferrara has been kind to you, its poets have sung your beauty. Your husband has been considerate. Years of happiness passed and methought you had forgot Rome. But, 'tis not to be. Dead embers are rekindled. Now one other who has sung your praise is the object of the Duke's misdirected anger, and you have not appeased him nor tried to these many days. I recall well how in Rome this was the beginning of much bloodshed—to breed misunderstanding. Recall well Gandia's death—that noble youth, whose name I cherish to this very day. How you dallied with Cesar and though

you loved Gandia more—you lost him in cruel murder. Remember Rome!

LUCREZIA

What fury has turned this girl? You preach? then you will not help! [*Exit Lucrezia.*]

ANGELA

She is furious now, but what of the fury in my heart dwelling there these many years? Gandia!—daily worship I have at your image and waft sweet incense of revenge to keep life in me fanned with a purpose. You live, Gandia, live in me, and this purpose has more promise than its budding. She loves madly and only now is my opportunity—Lucrezia Borgia needs little more than momentum, she gathers vehement force with time. I have helped, now I am free—I have done mine, for her, for myself, and for Gandia!

Curtain

ACT II

SCENE 1. Reception room.

COURT JESTER

I may have nibbled more of the truth than healthy; besides, that meat will surely indigest me. The Duke goes about with a frown and all things seem upset—even my pit. Even she, she most adorable in that she wrung my adoration, is not as sweet of disposition—fair Angela. [*Enter Angela.*] Ah, most beloved creature that ever walked upon two feet, I admit that I am no poet, but more than a poet's love I bear for you.

ANGELA

Knave! You compare me then with all bipeds—fine love you make of me.

COURT JESTER

Let me be your knave—only too—a kiss. [*Angela smacks him.*]

ANGELA

You fool. Your conceit is even greater than your knavery.

COURT JESTER

And my desire for you as much responsive to your exceeding beauty. What a sad lot is a fool's. He is sport for all but receives none from any.

ANGELA

You want me to sport with you, then?

COURT JESTER

Yes! Do I not conceal behind my mask of mirth? You have no mask, I know you dislike me, but I, having one, you can never guess how I love you.

ANGELA

Quite true, though my dislike for you is not as great as you say your love is for me. But how then shall I gauge your love for me, if yours be so well concealed?

COURT JESTER

Angela! If a fool be ever serious, then I am most serious now. Ask of me aught and I shall give it.

ANGELA

I promise then, if you grant me a favor at any moment I ask it, I shall make sport of you.

COURT JESTER

Agreed. Sport with me as I would with you.
[*Enter Duke.*]

ANGELA

Nay—

DUKE

Ha, ha, ha. The world is a-whirling like a merry whirligig and I see two fools where there is only one.

COURT JESTER

Sire, I am already doubly blessed.

ANGELA

Remember— [*Exit Angela.*]

DUKE

So soon gone. These lasses, do they fear me, fool?

COURT JESTER

They may not fear you, but, a-hm! Sire, you are to receive guest any moment—and you are rocking.

DUKE

Ha, ha, ha. Do not fear, fool, I shall sober up at the proper moment. What I quaffed will give

me courage of a different sort—courage these fool poets have. I shall show them,—her—Lucrezia!

COURT JESTER

Was it not the wise king, Solomon, who said that wine is a mocker and strong drink a brawler?

DUKE

True! Only this mockery shall fall upon others. Ha, ha, ha. [*Enter Ercole.*] Ercole Strozzi! [*Exit Court Jester.*]

ERCOLE

I, sire, upon your invitation.

DUKE

Welcome. Where is your wife, Barbara?

ERCOLE

Biding a few moments with the Duchess.

DUKE

She will be here then?

ERCOLE

Shortly.

DUKE

The Duchess has spoken of your desire for the red hat.

ERCOLE

Your most faithful servant.

DUKE

It would be a most appropriate gift to the poet who sung my wife's beauty to all the people of Ferrara—and to her own husband.

ERCOLE

Sire! I seek no remuneration but your own favor.

DUKE

Indeed! Strange coincidence to ask the Duchess for this gift. It would appear then your poetry was truly spontaneous.

ERCOLE

Without ulterior motive indeed, Sire. Sung with sincere appreciation of our beloved queen, as such in both court and beauty.

DUKE

What secret springs unwound such praise, then?

ERCOLE

That which lends color to life, sir, Art—the immortal love of Beauty.

DUKE

Immortal, eh? Art! It cannot, surely, be so sanctimonious as to claim itself entirely disinterested in its object of worship.

ERCOLE

Indeed, not, sir. It is its very inspiration. Only the fabric is woven of the fine thread of imagination.

DUKE

Quite true, quite true, then. It would appear then that for the adoration you bestow upon the Duchess—your inspiration, and which has entirely possessed your imagination—I am to grant you the red hat?

ERCOLE

I refute that, sire.

DUKE

And I—we shall see. [*Enter Lucrezia and Barbara.*]

LUCREZIA

Pietro Bembo has not come yet?

ERCOLE

He will be here shortly. I saw him a few moments before I left with my wife for the Palace—he was to come with us—only he was detained on the street.

LUCREZIA

What has detained him—to forfeit even a little of our time?

ERCOLE

An errand of mercy, madame. His heart is big.

BARBARA

What two lovers these are, Duchess. They have only praise for each other. Often am I jealous of Ercole, and of Pietro, the adulation they bear each other. Often they will sit till early dawn prodding loose some fossilized themes—often exchange their own. One will write a line and sing to the other, the other will do the same, then they will embrace. What glorious friendship this, into which I am uninitiate. What secrets they carry to each other in a word, a syllable, a look. It rivals very love, and methinks exceeds it.

DUKE

Indeed, exemplary. [*Enter Pietro.*] Here he is now, most faithful of my court.

PIETRO

Forgive this delay. I suffer most thereby.

DUKE

Let us delay no longer! To my gardens then, which rival Rome's very best. There is beauty in all its splendour. [*The Duke takes Barbara's arm, exit one direction; Pietro takes Lucrezia's arm, exit another.*]

ERCOLE

There goes my wife with the Duke, my friend with the Duchess. And I am left to explore alone the beauty of his gardens. From the Duke's speech it seems I am not destined for the red hat. His words were very unsavory—does he suspect me of courting his wife? I would not be surprised. This would prove bad for me—and more for Pietro. Friendship is its own virtue and I can do naught to clear up this tangle.

Curtain

SCENE 2. In the gardens. Discovered Pietro and
Lucrezia.

PIETRO

Love! Two long days—more aged than hoary time—that I did not see you. Those days, methinks, were more painful in their birth than the pains of childbirth. Slowly the gray dawn crept upon me and more slowly I relinquished all sweet images of you, absorbed in the disillusioning light of day. On came day in its endless hours, bitter with memory of vacant moments of the night; and so on again, doubly, till now, once more, I have in you both the joy of day and the glory of night.

LUCREZIA

O love, what would I do for want of you? Think not I sleep and perhaps dream of sweet moments that were, but more real, wakeful I lie and stretch my hands out—beyond— [*They embrace.*]

PIETRO

Oft I dare think this should not be! The Duke suspects naught—

LUCREZIA

Naught, Pietro!

PIETRO

'Tis behind his back; I would rather love you openly—affront him if need be—

LUCREZIA

Wait! I know your impulse—you think it unworthy—I, too, think so, our love is too great to be hidden long—but leave that moment to me, Pietro.

PIETRO

What can come of this, what? I love in the endless nights—then I think upon the Duke—our love cannot cease! What when the Duke knows, it could not last then?

LUCREZIA

Nay! But such love as ours will bring its own solution. It is worthy of it. If we cannot shape it, it will itself.

LUCREZIA

I would not shape it, Lucrezia! That is scheming, and that would be unworthy of you, sweet angel.

LUCREZIA

Then leave the thought—do not beckon it.
Rather enjoy the moment and leave all else—to
the winds.

PIETRO

How comforting your words. What solace in
your touch. What joy in the message of your
eyes. I nestle close to your bosom and I know
that its heart-beats are for me only.

LUCREZIA

Oh, lover! Would that your head reclined upon
it in other fashion and sucked all poison from
my blood.

PIETRO

Poison! You with those limpid eyes.

LUCREZIA

I cannot say—but you are noble, Pietro. Your
very breath is fragrant with the sweetness of
your being. And I—I am foul with suspicions
through love of you.

PIETRO

What's this?

LUCREZIA

I fear your friend, Ercole!

PIETRO

Ercole!

LUCREZIA

Yes, Ercole. Excepting Angela, who can be trusted, he is the only one who knows of our love. The Duke—

PIETRO

Ercole! he who would not tread upon a worm. Pray, Lucrezia, admit you are wrong.

LUCREZIA

Nay, I cannot. Ercole has asked me to plead with the Duke to grant him the red hat. I did. The Duke has no doubt refused him—this will anger him greatly.

PIETRO

Why should the Duke have refused him?

LUCREZIA

Because of Ercole's poems,—sung in my praise.

PIETRO

Even so, Ercole could not be feared for any cause.

LUCREZIA

For any cause, perhaps, but one.

PIETRO

And what is that?

LUCREZIA

His wife, Barbara.

PIETRO

I do not understand.

LUCREZIA

You know his exceeding love for his wife. The Duke has been attentive to her of late. More than your friendship is involved there. If he expose our affair he will distract the Duke from his wife. [*Silence.*] And the moment has not yet come.

PIETRO

Then I must speak to Ercole, even now. It may be only a woman's suspicions, but I respect a noblewoman's intuition.

LUCREZIA

To-morrow then—the way shall be prepared for you—come—come early—to my room. I shall await you. [*They embrace. Exit Pietro.*] Now the way is paved. Noble youth! It is all for you, sweet youth. I do this for you only—I must hide all from you—must plot against your friend, against the Duke, against you, to have you by my side undisturbed. Now he will go to Ercole—they will quarrel—Ercole will tell him the Duke suspects his own self and Pietro will not believe. I have anticipated him. Pietro through honor would otherwise have told the Duke the truth. Thus must I deceive my own lover, for his and my happiness. Thus will he be kept in ignorance—and his faith, faith that I must keep sacred, will not be shaken in me—and in his faith I can wait, wait for an opportunity—and proceed to my goal—our union. [*Exit Lucrezia. Enter Ercole.*]

ERCOLE

This spot alone excels any I have seen—everything but—this long have I wandered and not even crossed Barbara's path! To the Duchess can I leave good choice for seclusion with her lover, but the Duke—where are they? I shall

have to tell Pietro of this ridiculous situation—but no, I may thus interfere with his plans. [*Enter Pietro.*]

PIETRO

Ercole!

ERCOLE

Pietro!

PIETRO

I have sought you in the hall—everywhere. Were you alone?

ERCOLE

What else? The Duke cares little for a husband's prerogative.

PIETRO

Perhaps more so for his own, eh?

ERCOLE

Indeed, you should be wary—the Duke is in a temper.

PIETRO

So?

ERCOLE

Only he does not suspect you—as yet.

PIETRO

My blade is still trusty.

ERCOLE

What!

PIETRO

Nay, do not think my mind is turned because of love—but I do mean that—any in my way, except the Duke, I will not tolerate.

ERCOLE

And who can thus be interested?

PIETRO

I know not—

ERCOLE

Poor lover! You have your worries in attaining your goddess, but look at me, poor devil, I already have mine—and yet—

PIETRO

And yet what?

ERCOLE

The Duke is attentive to her. Barbara, as you know, is not very loving to the Duke in mind and I am sure she can be no other in action.

PIETRO

Then you should be content.

ERCOLE

Nay, the Duke—he may make trouble. He is very suspicious. It may be his way of counter-acting Lucrezia's amour—

PIETRO

But why Barbara?

ERCOLE

Ah—yes, yes—I—I—why? That is right, why?

PIETRO

You are hiding from your friend something I do not know. You do not desire to make me suspicious?

ERCOLE

You, Pietro? What pray could you suspect?

PIETRO

It is hard to say of one who is more wedded to me than my own years.

ERCOLE

Pietro! What is this casting its shadow over our friendship?

PIETRO

It appears, no child's play—one of the few to disrupt it—woman.

ERCOLE

Why speak so strangely? You love Lucrezia, I love Barbara, how do we conflict?

PIETRO

Then why do you not explain yourself. You say Barbara is the Duke's counter to his wife's affection for me—I ask why—you do not answer—

ERCOLE

I must answer?

PIETRO

If our friendship be still common.

ERCOLE

Then it is because the Duke suspects me—he is thus revenging himself upon me in courting Barbara—and avenging Lucrezia.

PIETRO

This does sound logical. [*Aside.*] Lucrezia must be wrong—

ERCOLE

Even more—he rejects my petition for cardinal—what other reason?

PIETRO

Forgive, dear friend—lovers' matters should not enter between men.

ERCOLE

Indeed not. What say you, Pietro—a little fencing tonight after we leave—

PIETRO

Agreed! Remember when we first gripped swords? Only once was I at your mercy—

ERCOLE

That is a compliment, dear friend, to have even succeeded once—such swordsman is rare.

PIETRO

But then I bow my head to your singing—

ERCOLE

Nay you are younger—your lines show great promise— [*Enter Barbara in haste.*]

ERCOLE

What is?

BARBARA

Nay—nay, do not ask—Ercole, dear—only let us hence—away from this vile place—hurry--hurry—

ERCOLE

What is wrong, dear? What has happened?

PIETRO

I will leave—

BARBARA

Nay, stay Pietro—and learn a Duke's honor. We walked in the garden—talked of things of the moment—I remarked of his marvelous gardens— O 'tis terrible—

ERCOLE

Speak out—

BARBARA

Thus we whiled our time—till he spoke of you—of your request for the red hat—of his hesitancy in granting—oh—

ERCOLE

Dear, dear, speak on!

BARBARA

Then he finally blurted out his shameful words—that I favor him personally to win you the red hat. Oh [*weeps*].

PIETRO

By the Holy Virgin!

ERCOLE

I shall find him and—slay him!

PIETRO

Nay, nay, here let me hold you Ercole—a moment—a moment—do you not see—do you not see your wife—she needs your attention—we must escort her—she is pale—nay, listen—I come here tomorrow, early, to see the Duchess—wait—I—wait till tomorrow Ercole—I shall

help you—only the Duchess—she must know—
I will arrange [*Ercole relaxes*] perhaps a
duel—

ERCOLE

Dear, dear, Barbara—come let us hasten—to-
morrow—tomorrow! [*Exit all. Enter Duke.*]

DUKE

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh—my sides—she fled like
a bird—how shall I say—these poets— I haven't
learned their rhymes yet—but their art—ha,
ha, ha, ha—a little crude maybe—but there was
no mistaking—now—ha, ha, ha—Ercole cannot
mistake it—nor Lucrezia—and he, no doubt, the
poor fool, will come for fight—and who in
Ferrara excels the Duke in swordsmanship—or
even Rome—Rome—Rome! Ha, ha, ha, ha!
[*Enter Court Jester.*] Here you are then, eh—
what a lass she was, fool—what a lass!

COURT JESTER

What a lass!
One cannot pass,
The husband, alas,
Becomes an ass!

DUKE

Ha, ha, ha—now I have my poetry.

COURT JESTER

An ass a poet would be,
He brayed from morn to night,
To sing his poetry
He brayed with all his might.

DUKE

Ha, ha, ha, ha—

COURT JESTER

A poet an ass would be
—Preferred he this sad life—
And sung his poetry
The while he lost his wife.

DUKE

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Curtain

ACT III

SCENE 1. Street in Ferrara. Discovered citizens of Ferrara.

FIRST CITIZEN

Many springs have passed, sweet with the breath of new blooming flowers; but none like this, to awaken our court from its peaceful state.

SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, you would think, to new added peace it would awaken them—to new joy of calm.

THIRD CITIZEN

Instead! to distraction!

FIRST CITIZEN

'Tis puzzling, and hard to learn the truth.

SECOND CITIZEN

Indeed! Be it the Duke whose restlessness is the cause of this in all its ugly rumors—or, mayhap our queen?

FIRST CITIZEN

I know it cannot be the Duchess. How her hand in this, when 'twas the Duke who did the insult!

THIRD CITIZEN

But what of this rumor? That the Duchess has some lover—some say Ercole Strozzi—some say some other youth of the court?

SECOND CITIZEN

Even so, why the Duke's behavior toward Strozzi's beloved wife? Nay, this is disconcerting, and I am glad that it makes only gossip for us.

THIRD CITIZEN

But, do you not know, the Duke suspects Ercole Strozzi in courting his wife, that is why.

FIRST CITIZEN

I do not believe a bit of this. Our Duchess? She who has done more for our city, our poor, than any one? She is the very angel of heaven—have you not seen her—how accuse her?

SECOND CITIZEN

Indeed! I cannot see its truth. It must be the Duke—they say he was half drunk when he insulted Barbara last eve.

THIRD CITIZEN

Yes—and this morn will see the outcome of it all. Ercole will no doubt exchange swords.

FIRST CITIZEN

He will make a good aim for the Duke's sword. Poor, noble man.

THIRD CITIZEN

Quite true. And were it not for Pietro Bembo, Ercole would have been a dead man last night.

SECOND CITIZEN

There is the swordsman! Pietro Bembo! The only equal to the Duke.

FIRST CITIZEN

Indeed! but fate has not chosen him to face the Duke! [*Enter two hooded men; they remain in the rear.*] Who are they?

THIRD CITIZEN

A suspicious looking pair.

SECOND CITIZEN

Do you think them Ferrarese?

FIRST CITIZEN

It is hard to judge. But we must go—our daily duties call us and thankful are we to have them!
[*Exit citizens.*]

FIRST MAN

It is here then we must watch!

SECOND MAN

From our orders—yes.

FIRST MAN

Sh—Back! Here comes one of the court—I believe Angela Borgia. [*Enter Angela.*]

ANGELA

What strange men, cowering there behind me. And yet their forms are not so strange. Methinks I know them. They are up to mischief, perhaps. I'll pretend leaving and haunt this very spot. [*Angela goes out, but returns hiding.*]

FIRST MAN

[*They speak in whispers*] She has gone!

SECOND MAN

Do you think she recognized us?

FIRST MAN

We are well disguised. Would that he were coming this way soon and we were through with this dirty business.

SECOND MAN

Sh! Here comes some one now. Let us hide. It may be he. [*Enter Ercole Strozzi.*]

ERCOLE

Here am I now—but a few moments from the Palace—and no one to hold me back—no—not Barbara nor Pietro. He has gone to the Duchess—he will arrange things for me—my honor has not fallen so low—I will show him—this Duke—this puppet—this fool— [*He is about to leave when the two men fall upon him and stab him in the back. Angela is seen hastening from the scene. The two men disappear. An alarm rises as citizens gather about and recognize the dead body of Ercole Strozzi.*]

Curtain

SCENE 2. Lucrezia's private room.

LUCREZIA

Now it will be done and fate needs little more prompting. My husband in his folly has aided me more than all—I need not now fan suspicion between these two friends, so dangerous a thing in truth. I must promote it—the blame will fall upon the Duke—and then—Pietro's sword for revenge! O Pietro, Pietro! Again I have anticipated you to wring out our mutual joy, to possess each other, as only lovers should. I am already tingling with the fulfillment of my desires—I cannot wait—my heart—ah, how it loves, loves you—you only—and, how it disdains all that holds me from you. It must triumph in both, love and disdain. My nocturnal plottings will bring my lover to me in the night—as mine—mine in all his being—none to dictate otherwise. None to stand in my way! None! My designs—they are as inevitable as fate—have I not mothered them? They cannot renounce me! Nothing can bend them—they must triumph! [*Enter Pietro.*] Lover! [*They embrace.*]

PIETRO

It is ill that the morn that should feed me with

kisses only, should be blighted with other serious matters.

LUCREZIA

You mean the Duke's folly?

PIETRO

Folly of him, but more serious to the others. I could barely hold Ercole back from going at once to the Duke. I knew it would have been his death. Now I left him, more impatient than ever—he promised to remain till I return, having sought your advice.

LUCREZIA

You detained him, Pietro?

PIETRO

Yes. My honor is in this too, love. Last eve, having listened to your forebodings, I went to Ercole and felt my way to its truth—and there was none. We are friends as ever. The proof of which lies in the Duke's behavior—he did suspect Ercole and thus insulted Barbara in his drunken humor.

LUCREZIA

I regret having uttered such words. Nothing can

cast a blemish on such character as Ercole's. My love for you, Pietro, blinded me for the moment.

PIETRO

And now, I cannot have Ercole suffer for this—my affair. The moment has come, Lucrezia, and we must decide what to do.

LUCREZIA

Indeed! What can we do. If you speak the truth—know, the Duke can impose death upon you—or else banish you—either way—

PIETRO

I might insult him—or else take Ercole's grievance upon myself to avenge—

LUCREZIA

It is not for the Duke to fight you unless there be good ground, he will use his authority.

PIETRO

But I cannot leave Ercole—

LUCREZIA

And leave me?

PIETRO

Nay love, 'twould be a task to miss your eyes and your fascinating, supple ways, but—I could not love you if I had no honor, and friendship feeds upon that!

LUCREZIA

You are my noble lover— [*Enter servant.*]

SERVANT

Ercole Strozzi has been found slain nearby, stabbed.

PIETRO

Ercole slain! [*Exit Pietro in haste.*]

LUCREZIA

For a moment, I feared my plans were gone to naught—but now, faithful servant, you say it is done.

SERVANT

Stabbed in the back, till dead!

LUCREZIA

Was there any one nigh?

SERVANT

For a while, merchants were passing to the market, then Angela Borgia passed us, but was soon gone. Then came Ercole Strozzi, proceeding to the Duke in a rage, then—

LUCREZIA

Here is your reward. [*Exit servant.*] It is done, then. The rest will care for itself. I am free now, free! Free of plotting and care, of fear and hope—only this—this last act and I am through—his sword is here—left in haste—now I cannot fear—he will prick him of certain—it is done! Now I can be—myself. [*Enter Angela.*] My servant has just informed me Strozzi is slain almost before the Palace doors.

ANGELA

Yes, cousin, slain.

LUCREZIA

It does not even startle you? Once, methought, you were a sweet-tempered girl, now blood cannot phase you?

ANGELA

Am I not a Borgia? Have I not been reared

well—in Rome? Does this startle you, cousin, the true Borgia. Years ago, in Rome, 'twas but daily food for your spirit, why this wonder?

LUCREZIA

What ghosts do you bring up of the past, you—you! What do you do here? What bearing has your speech? What do you mean, you remnant of forgotten days? Why plague me with days that are long cut off?

ANGELA

Such fury of a sudden! Why this spurt of conscience—does it reflect something of fear? What fear have you, Duchess of Ferrara?

LUCREZIA

Out, you. Away from me, dreamer of forgotten love, my own brother. You carry with you, in you, the poison of the past. Away, I say.

ANGELA

But, pray, what has all this to do with Ercole's death? You want me startled, frightened, timid? Ha, ha, ha, where Lucrezia Borgia is, there wonder ceases. [*Exit Angela.*]

LUCREZIA

What is this? Does she suspect—perhaps know? She passed the spot— [*Rings for servant.*] I must know the truth at once—no delay—does she know—or does she only suspect. [*Enter servant.*] You say Angela Borgia passed the spot—speak the truth only—it is important—tell me all.

SERVANT

I know no more. A few moments before she passed—carrying some victuals for the cook—she hesitated, then disappeared.

LUCREZIA

Where did she go?

SERVANT

I know not. We looked down the street—she was gone, no doubt into the Palace. [*Exit servant.*]

LUCREZIA

She suspects then. What has come over me—only a while ago—I was free—and now—fear possessed me.— Do you fear this girl? She knows nothing. This much must be done—I must hurry all to completion, ere she bestir herself to learn too much. [*Enter Pietro.*] Pietro!

PIETRO

Ercole is dead!

LUCREZIA

Dead!

PIETRO

My Lucrezia! Ercole is dead! Murdered in the streets! Slain! Stabbed in the back, pierced through his very heart! My friend—slain!

LUCREZIA

Pietro!

PIETRO

What solace can I find—even though I be with you? O Time, that brought this day, unheralded, with grief upon my head, you have signaled me out of Ferrara to be stricken with sorrow. With stealth, Lucrezia, came this morn unapprised. Too honorable was he to linger home to await my return—chivalrous always, he courted death on the streets. But who was there to fear this man whose sword ne'er pierced because its wielder could not shed blood? This man who weaned me from all things mundane and opened the very portals of heaven so that I glimpse beauty? Oh, oh, my lifelong friend is not only gone but slain, slain in the streets.

Whose heart could be so cruel, whose senses so disproportioned as to not perceive the nobility of this man? Him—who harmed no one, devoted to the muse, rejoicing in his love, him—slain!

LUCREZIA

Love! the dead breathe back upon the living the injustice done them—it is for the noble to right it!

PIETRO

Now, love, you speak, well worthy of your station. O Time! you are but a cycle, a wheel rotating upon the axis of justice—it shall rotate back upon the heads of the guilty—and wreak upon them their doom.

LUCREZIA

Often we must grasp it by the forelock—

PIETRO

Who did this foul deed—?

LUCREZIA

You say he was slain before the Palace. I did not think my husband a coward.

PIETRO

You mean—

LUCREZIA

Dispatched even before—

PIETRO

Lucrezia, the Duke—

LUCREZIA

Who else bore grudge to this beloved citizen?
Have you not just said he thought him my lover
—did he not insult Barbara—

PIETRO

'Tis your husband, then?

LUCREZIA

Aye, but too foul to remain so.

PIETRO

Here I vow then, by my sword, by the sanctity
of my friendship, by my love for you, by all that
is sacred, that the sun that saw Ercole's death
shall see Ercole avenged.

Curtain

ACT IV

SCENE 1. Court-room.

ANGELA

'Tis not for naught then, these many years have crept upon me. Already have I found balm in the fear of her eyes—a thing that could not be in Rome—but, 'tis not enough! She must learn my pangs in her own. Fate has been too kind to her, too helpful with her plans, too bending to her will—I will undo it! Mere exposal is not all? That would be sweet compared to my agonies—Gandia must be avenged in Borgia fashion. She is enwrapped in her lover, her plans are all for him—he is her weakness, nothing else would daunt her. I have it! It needs but little thinking—no one is the equal to the Duke in swordsmanship—he should die by his sword. [*Enter Court Jester.*]

COURT JESTER

Only you, sweet maid, may have use for me now.

ANGELA

What is?

COURT JESTER

The Palace is draped in dreariness and everybody is sick in heart. I am out of place, no one to console me, to—

ANGELA

Poor fool! Even you cannot relieve the situation.

COURT JESTER

But I am happy once more in your presence, Angela.

ANGELA

[*Pats him on cheek.*] Listen, fool, recall my promise—not too hasty now, my kisses must be earned.

COURT JESTER

I will earn them, then.

ANGELA

Tell me, do you know aught of Ercole's death?

COURT JESTER

It is most difficult to understand who slew him. But, one thing I know, and that I think, no one else knows in the Court.

ANGELA

And what is that?

COURT JESTER

The true lover of the Duchess was not this dead man but—Pietro Bembo!

ANGELA

You know more than I could credit you for. You are right. But how know you this?

COURT JESTER

Ha, ha! There are no two spots where I am not at the same moment. Often I was about to disillusion the Duke, and many opportunities I had in those cursed hunting trips—but, I was not being paid for tell-tales.

ANGELA

You are even wiser than your vocation. But the time has come when the Duke must be told.

COURT JESTER

Is this what you ask of me?

ANGELA

Yes.

COURT JESTER

Then I shall not kiss Angela once.

ANGELA

What! You fear telling the truth?

COURT JESTER

But I shall kiss her many times.

ANGELA

Now! Your first opportunity—but mark my words—see that the Duke's anger is not lodged in his authority, but more furious, seek justice by the sword.

COURT JESTER

I understand! And now one thing I ask and the bargain is struck!

ANGELA

What?

COURT JESTER

I must have a deposit on your promise.

ANGELA

Ha, ha, you fool! [*Kisses him; exit.*]

COURT JESTER

It is no mean task. [*Enter Duke.*]

DUKE

Fool! you seem to pop up at direst moments.

COURT JESTER

Therein lies my wisdom. Were you, lord, already happy, I would be useless.

DUKE

I seek not to be humored now. Too many ominous things have crossed my path and a shadow has fallen over the Palace with the death of Ercole Strozzi. Fools sometimes trip upon wise things, Jester, and it is always for the wise to ask and the fool to answer—then tell me, have you heard or do you know anything in this murder?

COURT JESTER

First allow me to correct you—it is no more accidental for the fool to be wise than the wise foolish. Secondly, if the wise are to ask and the foolish to answer, then the fools wise must be, for they can ask more than the wise can answer—

DUKE

And just the fool you are—all else you speak of—my question you do not answer.

COURT JESTER

Each in turn. Were I to know the murderer I would need no wisdom, and since I am an ignorant fool, I can only suspect.

DUKE

Let me have your suspicion, then.

COURT JESTER

Or, I should not say suspicion, I can only leave that to you, I should say what I know—Pietro Bembo is your wife's wooer, and not as you suspected, Ercole Strozzi.

DUKE

Pietro Bembo! What a fool I was!—It is so!—What an ass I made of myself to be so tricked, so deceived. This woman—what is she, what is her game—this murder—her mind has woven all this—the Roman ways in a peaceful state—I am duped—Ferrara is duped by a Spanish trick-

ster.—But Ferrara with one slash of the sword
can cut all this open—this gallant—this wife—
[*Exit Duke.*]

COURT JESTER

I have earned it—

Be it the cause I know not,
'Twill stir the seething pot
To overboiling;

When the broth becomes too hot
Then will all this rot
Be rid of its soiling.

[*Exit Court Jester. Enter Lucrezia.*]

LUCREZIA

I have conquered all-devouring time, for it
speeds at my behest to my goal. I have harnessed
its wings and its scythe shall clip the length of
his life. His hours, withered at a stroke, shall add
one sweet moment to mine. My lover's sword is
poisoned at the point and it needs but prick to
kill. [*Enter Duke.*]

DUKE

So you are here. I was sure to find you in pri-
vacy with your gallant.

LUCREZIA

What now?

DUKE

Give me not your innocent look that has caused many to sing you an angel. Rather open your bosom and stand defiant and cry—thus have I favored another—thus have I duped all—thus has a man died—

LUCREZIA

Ercole's death is your doing. None other would take his life by stealth when he was coming to avenge your insult to his wife.

DUKE

Shameless woman. Shameless liar. I can pick harlots in the beaten paths and they would accord me more honor, not to my station, but as man—than you have—this foul accusation—I shall see to it and to you— [*Enter Pietro unperceived.*]—but first I shall find your gallant—Pietro Bembo—him, to whom you have proved harlot—even worse than your own mother in her days—then— [*Pietro steps out.*]

PIETRO

Not far have you to go to have your bloody hands cleansed in your own blood. Why a husband, a murderer, demand virtue unto himself I know not—but now you will get what you deserve— [*They draw swords.*]

DUKE

To prove your accusation is beneath my dignity—you will court Mephisto in hell with your jingles. [*They fight.*]

LUCREZIA

So far have I coaxed fate, to these very blades—it cannot deny me—I can do no more.

PIETRO

Ah!

DUKE

Only a scratch! [*They fight on for a few moments, the Duke in pain suddenly drops his guard and Pietro runs him through.*] You have me! I am dying—'tis ill your faithlessness to the Duke was not repaid—nor Ercole's death avenged—but— [*Dies.*]

PIETRO

What! What's this! Ercole's death not avenged!

LUCREZIA

Nay, dear lover, he lied—come, we are free—

PIETRO

The parting words of life never lie— [*Enter Angela.*]

ANGELA

Jesu! the Duke is dead!

PIETRO

Aye—I have slain him—

ANGELA

To avenge Ercole, eh? Ha, ha, ha!

PIETRO

Angela!

ANGELA

You have slain an innocent man!

LUCREZIA

Away, away—

PIETRO

Maria! Nay—stay—I must know the truth—I am already steeped in blood—I am vowed to revenge—even now, two!

ANGELA

Indeed, two! I was coming from the market place to the Palace when two hooded men appeared to act strangely—I recognized them. I returned and spied on them. Before I could read their thoughts from their actions Ercole Strozzi, who was passing, was slain!

PIETRO

And who were these men?

ANGELA

Hirelings of—

LUCREZIA

Angela Borgia—of my own blood—Angela Borgia—

PIETRO

Whose hirelings?

ANGELA

Hirelings of Lucrezia Borgia. [*Exit Angela.*]

PIETRO

What's this! Christus!

LUCREZIA

Can you not see, it is all for you, Pietro, all for you, we are free—

PIETRO

You have slain Ercole—here lies your husband—and here you are, treacherous, athrob—and I—murderer that I am—

LUCREZIA

Our love, Pietro!

PIETRO

Love! Dare you love—such love you mean—

LUCREZIA

Pietro!

PIETRO

And what of my oath—you have it in your breath—the blood of Ercole, the Duke—the honor of my oath!

LUCREZIA

Forget all this, lover—we can—

PIETRO

Profane thought! Think you I can look at you without summoning Ercole's face—what love can it be you desire now if not exultation in your own debauchery. Can you kiss my lips without feeling their sting—burning with vengeance. Off my arm—it is under oath—Jesu! Shall I slay you, Lucrezia—?

LUCREZIA

You love me yet. Pietro—

PIETRO

Away—how feel your heaving bosom when behind it lies a treacherous heart—and yet—Christus—I cannot pierce it—I know it in all its loveliness—I cannot fleck its snow-white beauty that once gave me ecstasy, with blood.

LUCREZIA

Here, then, let me have your thrust—far sweeter your sword where once your head reclined—

PIETRO

Nay, nay, I shall not slay you, I—

LUCREZIA

You are still my—

PIETRO

Nay, why slay you—ha, ha, ha—with one stroke I can revenge all—why slay you, who know not sweet sincerity, that which makes full the cup of life, and therefore cannot fear nor cherish death. Only when its sting shall smite you as I have been smitten—then will you desire death at your lover's hands—but your lover shall not be there to give such joy [*stabs himself*] then shall you feel the sting of your own vile nature, then shall you long for death.—It is fulfilled. Ercole lives again. He drinks from the dregs of your agony—far sweeter than your death. [*Dies.*]

LUCREZIA

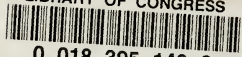
Madonna mia! [*Faints.*]

Curtain





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