

The Duchess of Padua

Oscar Wilde

Table of Contents

<u>The Duchess of Padua</u>	1
<u>Oscar Wilde</u>	1
<u>ACT I</u>	1

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- [ACT I](#)
- [ACT II](#)
- [ACT III](#)
- [ACT IV](#)
- [ACT V](#)

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THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Simone Gesso, Duke of Padua
Beatrice, his Wife
Andreas Pollajuolo, Cardinal of Padua
Maffio Petrucci, }
Jeppo Vitellozzo, } Gentlemen of the Duke's Household
Taddeo Bardi, }
Guido Ferranti, a Young Man
Ascanio Cristofano, his Friend
Count Moranzone, an Old Man
Bernardo Cavalcanti, Lord Justice of Padua
Hugo, the Headsman
Lucy, a Tire woman

Servants, Citizens, Soldiers, Monks, Falconers with their hawks and dogs, etc.

Place: Padua

Time: The latter half of the Sixteenth Century

Style of Architecture: Italian, Gothic and Romanesque.

ACT I

The Duchess of Padua

SCENE

The Market Place of Padua at noon; in the background is the great Cathedral of Padua; the architecture is Romanesque, and wrought in black and white marbles; a flight of marble steps leads up to the Cathedral door; at the foot of the steps are two large stone lions; the houses on each aide of the stage have coloured awnings from their windows, and are flanked by stone arcades; on the right of the stage is the public fountain, with a triton in green bronze blowing from a conch; around the fountain is a stone seat; the bell of the Cathedral is ringing, and the citizens, men, women and children, are passing into the Cathedral.

[Enter GUIDO FERRANTI and ASCANIO CRISTOFANO.]

ASCANIO

Now by my life, Guido, I will go no farther; for if I walk another step I will have no life left to swear by; this wild–goose errand of yours!

[Sits down on the step of the fountain.]

GUIDO

I think it must be here. [Goes up to passer–by and doffs his cap.] Pray, sir, is this the market place, and that the church of Santa Croce? [Citizen bows.] I thank you, sir.

ASCANIO

Well?

GUIDO

Ay! it is here.

ASCANIO

I would it were somewhere else, for I see no wine–shop.

GUIDO

[Taking a letter from his pocket and reading it.] 'The hour noon; the city, Padua; the place, the market; and the day, Saint Philip's Day.'

ASCANIO

The Duchess of Padua

And what of the man, how shall we know him?

GUIDO

[reading still] 'I will wear a violet cloak with a silver falcon broidered on the shoulder.' A brave attire, Ascanio.

ASCANIO

I'd sooner have my leathern jerkin. And you think he will tell you of your father?

GUIDO

Why, yes! It is a month ago now, you remember; I was in the vineyard, just at the corner nearest the road, where the goats used to get in, a man rode up and asked me was my name Guido, and gave me this letter, signed 'Your Father's Friend,' bidding me be here to-day if I would know the secret of my birth, and telling me how to recognise the writer! I had always thought old Pedro was my uncle, but he told me that he was not, but that I had been left a child in his charge by some one he had never since seen.

ASCANIO

And you don't know who your father is?

GUIDO

No.

ASCANIO

No recollection of him even?

GUIDO

None, Ascanio, none.

ASCANIO

[laughing] Then he could never have boxed your ears so often as my father did mine.

GUIDO

[smiling] I am sure you never deserved it.

ASCANIO

Never; and that made it worse. I hadn't the consciousness of guilt

The Duchess of Padua

to buoy me up. What hour did you say he fixed?

GUIDO

Noon. [Clock in the Cathedral strikes.]

ASCANIO

It is that now, and your man has not come. I don't believe in him, Guido. I think it is some wench who has set her eye at you; and, as I have followed you from Perugia to Padua, I swear you shall follow me to the nearest tavern. [Rises.] By the great gods of eating, Guido, I am as hungry as a widow is for a husband, as tired as a young maid is of good advice, and as dry as a monk's sermon. Come, Guido, you stand there looking at nothing, like the fool who tried to look into his own mind; your man will not come.

GUIDO

Well, I suppose you are right. Ah! [Just as he is leaving the stage with ASCANIO, enter LORD MORANZONE in a violet cloak, with a silver falcon brodered on the shoulder; he passes across to the Cathedral, and just as he is going in GUIDO runs up and touches him.]

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti, thou hast come in time.

GUIDO

What! Does my father live?

MORANZONE

Ay! lives in thee.
Thou art the same in mould and lineament,
Carriage and form, and outward semblances;
I trust thou art in noble mind the same.

GUIDO

Oh, tell me of my father; I have lived
But for this moment.

MORANZONE

We must be alone.

GUIDO

The Duchess of Padua

This is my dearest friend, who out of love
Has followed me to Padua; as two brothers,
There is no secret which we do not share.

MORANZONE

There is one secret which ye shall not share;
Bid him go hence.

GUIDO

[to ASCANIO] Come back within the hour.
He does not know that nothing in this world
Can dim the perfect mirror of our love.
Within the hour come.

ASCANIO

Speak not to him,
There is a dreadful terror in his look.

GUIDO

[laughing]
Nay, nay, I doubt not that he has come to tell
That I am some great Lord of Italy,
And we will have long days of joy together.
Within the hour, dear Ascanio.
[Exit ASCANIO.]
Now tell me of my father?
[Sits down on a stone seat.]
Stood he tall?
I warrant he looked tall upon his horse.
His hair was black? or perhaps a reddish gold,
Like a red fire of gold? Was his voice low?
The very bravest men have voices sometimes
Full of low music; or a clarion was it
That brake with terror all his enemies?
Did he ride singly? or with many squires
And valiant gentlemen to serve his state?
For oftentimes methinks I feel my veins
Beat with the blood of kings. Was he a king?

MORANZONE

Ay, of all men he was the kingliest.

GUIDO

[proudly] Then when you saw my noble father last
He was set high above the heads of men?

MORANZONE

Ay, he was high above the heads of men,
[Walks over to GUIDO and puts his hand upon his shoulder.]
On a red scaffold, with a butcher's block
Set for his neck.

GUIDO

[leaping up]
What dreadful man art thou,
That like a raven, or the midnight owl,
Com'st with this awful message from the grave?

MORANZONE

I am known here as the Count Moranzone,
Lord of a barren castle on a rock,
With a few acres of unkindly land
And six not thrifty servants. But I was one
Of Parma's noblest princes; more than that,
I was your father's friend.

GUIDO

[clasping his hand] Tell me of him.

MORANZONE

You are the son of that great Duke Lorenzo,
He was the Prince of Parma, and the Duke
Of all the fair domains of Lombardy
Down to the gates of Florence; nay, Florence even
Was wont to pay him tribute –

GUIDO

Come to his death.

MORANZONE

You will hear that soon enough. Being at war –
O noble lion of war, that would not suffer
Injustice done in Italy! – he led
The very flower of chivalry against
That foul adulterous Lord of Rimini,
Giovanni Malatesta – whom God curse!
And was by him in treacherous ambush taken,
And like a villain, or a low-born knave,
Was by him on the public scaffold murdered.

GUIDO

[clutching his dagger] Doth Malatesta live?

MORANZONE

No, he is dead.

GUIDO

Did you say dead? O too swift runner, Death,
Couldst thou not wait for me a little space,
And I had done thy bidding!

MORANZONE

[clutching his wrist] Thou canst do it!
The man who sold thy father is alive.

GUIDO

Sold! was my father sold?

MORANZONE

Ay! trafficked for,
Like a vile chattel, for a price betrayed,
Bartered and bargained for in privy market
By one whom he had held his perfect friend,
One he had trusted, one he had well loved,
One whom by ties of kindness he had bound –

GUIDO

And he lives
Who sold my father?

MORANZONE

I will bring you to him.

GUIDO

So, Judas, thou art living! well, I will make
This world thy field of blood, so buy it straight–way,
For thou must hang there.

MORANZONE

Judas said you, boy?

The Duchess of Padua

Yes, Judas in his treachery, but still
He was more wise than Judas was, and held
Those thirty silver pieces not enough.

GUIDO

What got he for my father's blood?

MORANZONE

What got he?
Why cities, fiefs, and principalities,
Vineyards, and lands.

GUIDO

Of which he shall but keep
Six feet of ground to rot in. Where is he,
This damned villain, this foul devil? where?
Show me the man, and come he cased in steel,
In complete panoply and pride of war,
Ay, guarded by a thousand men-at-arms,
Yet I shall reach him through their spears, and feel
The last black drop of blood from his black heart
Crawl down my blade. Show me the man, I say,
And I will kill him.

MORANZONE

[coldly]
Fool, what revenge is there?
Death is the common heritage of all,
And death comes best when it comes suddenly.
[Goes up close to GUIDO.]
Your father was betrayed, there is your cue;
For you shall sell the seller in his turn.
I will make you of his household, you shall sit
At the same board with him, eat of his bread –

GUIDO

O bitter bread!

MORANZONE

Thy palate is too nice,
Revenge will make it sweet. Thou shalt o' nights
Pledge him in wine, drink from his cup, and be
His intimate, so he will fawn on thee,
Love thee, and trust thee in all secret things.
If he bid thee be merry thou must laugh,

The Duchess of Padua

And if it be his humour to be sad
Thou shalt don sables. Then when the time is ripe –
[GUIDO clutches his sword.]
Nay, nay, I trust thee not; your hot young blood,
Undisciplined nature, and too violent rage
Will never tarry for this great revenge,
But wreck itself on passion.

GUIDO

Thou knowest me not.
Tell me the man, and I in everything
Will do thy bidding.

MORANZONE

Well, when the time is ripe,
The victim trusting and the occasion sure,
I will by sudden secret messenger
Send thee a sign.

GUIDO

How shall I kill him, tell me?

MORANZONE

That night thou shalt creep into his private chamber;
But if he sleep see that thou wake him first,
And hold thy hand upon his throat, ay! that way,
Then having told him of what blood thou art,
Sprung from what father, and for what revenge,
Bid him to pray for mercy; when he prays,
Bid him to set a price upon his life,
And when he strips himself of all his gold
Tell him thou needest not gold, and hast not mercy,
And do thy business straight away. Swear to me
Thou wilt not kill him till I bid thee do it,
Or else I go to mine own house, and leave
Thee ignorant, and thy father unavenged.

GUIDO

Now by my father's sword –

MORANZONE

The common hangman
Brake that in sunder in the public square.

GUIDO

The Duchess of Padua

Then by my father's grave –

MORANZONE

What grave? what grave?
Your noble father lieth in no grave,
I saw his dust strewn on the air, his ashes
Whirled through the windy streets like common straws
To plague a beggar's eyesight, and his head,
That gentle head, set on the prison spike,
For the vile rabble in their insolence
To shoot their tongues at.

GUIDO

Was it so indeed?
Then by my father's spotless memory,
And by the shameful manner of his death,
And by the base betrayal by his friend,
For these at least remain, by these I swear
I will not lay my hand upon his life
Until you bid me, then – God help his soul,
For he shall die as never dog died yet.
And now, the sign, what is it?

MORANZONE

This dagger, boy;
It was your father's.

GUIDO

Oh, let me look at it!
I do remember now my reputed uncle,
That good old husbandman I left at home,
Told me a cloak wrapped round me when a babe
Bare too such yellow leopards wrought in gold;
I like them best in steel, as they are here,
They suit my purpose better. Tell me, sir,
Have you no message from my father to me?

MORANZONE

Poor boy, you never saw that noble father,
For when by his false friend he had been sold,
Alone of all his gentlemen I escaped
To bear the news to Parma to the Duchess.

GUIDO

The Duchess of Padua

Speak to me of my mother.

MORANZONE

When thy mother
Heard my black news, she fell into a swoon,
And, being with untimely travail seized –
Bare thee into the world before thy time,
And then her soul went heavenward, to wait
Thy father, at the gates of Paradise.

GUIDO

A mother dead, a father sold and bartered!
I seem to stand on some beleaguered wall,
And messenger comes after messenger
With a new tale of terror; give me breath,
Mine ears are tired.

MORANZONE

When thy mother died,
Fearing our enemies, I gave it out
Thou wert dead also, and then privily
Conveyed thee to an ancient servitor,
Who by Perugia lived; the rest thou knowest.

GUIDO

Saw you my father afterwards?

MORANZONE

Ay! once;
In mean attire, like a vineyard dresser,
I stole to Rimini.

GUIDO

[taking his hand]
O generous heart!

MORANZONE

One can buy everything in Rimini,
And so I bought the gaolers! when your father
Heard that a man child had been born to him,
His noble face lit up beneath his helm
Like a great fire seen far out at sea,
And taking my two hands, he bade me, Guido,
To rear you worthy of him; so I have reared you

The Duchess of Padua

To revenge his death upon the friend who sold him.

GUIDO

Thou hast done well; I for my father thank thee.
And now his name?

MORANZONE

How you remind me of him,
You have each gesture that your father had.

GUIDO

The traitor's name?

MORANZONE

Thou wilt hear that anon;
The Duke and other nobles at the Court
Are coming hither.

GUIDO

What of that? his name?

MORANZONE

Do they not seem a valiant company
Of honourable, honest gentlemen?

GUIDO

His name, milord?

[Enter the DUKE OF PADUA with COUNT BARDI, MAFFIO, PETRUCCI, and
other gentlemen of his Court.]

MORANZONE

[quickly]
The man to whom I kneel
Is he who sold your father! mark me well.

GUIDO

[clutches hit dagger]
The Duke!

MORANZONE

The Duchess of Padua

Leave off that fingering of thy knife.
Hast thou so soon forgotten?
[Kneels to the DUKE.]
My noble Lord.

DUKE

Welcome, Count Moranzone; 'tis some time
Since we have seen you here in Padua.
We hunted near your castle yesterday –
Call you it castle? that bleak house of yours
Wherein you sit a–mumbling o'er your beads,
Telling your vices like a good old man.
[Catches sight of GUIDO and starts back.]
Who is that?

MORANZONE

My sister's son, your Grace,
Who being now of age to carry arms,
Would for a season tarry at your Court

DUKE

[still looking at GUIDO]
What is his name?

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti, sir.

DUKE

His city?

MORANZONE

He is Mantuan by birth.

DUKE

[advancing towards GUIDO]
You have the eyes of one I used to know,
But he died childless. Are you honest, boy?
Then be not spendthrift of your honesty,
But keep it to yourself; in Padua
Men think that honesty is ostentatious, so
It is not of the fashion. Look at these lords.

COUNT BARDI

The Duchess of Padua

[aside]

Here is some bitter arrow for us, sure.

DUKE

Why, every man among them has his price,
Although, to do them justice, some of them
Are quite expensive.

COUNT BARDI

[aside]

There it comes indeed.

DUKE

So be not honest; eccentricity
Is not a thing should ever be encouraged,
Although, in this dull stupid age of ours,
The most eccentric thing a man can do
Is to have brains, then the mob mocks at him;
And for the mob, despise it as I do,
I hold its bubble praise and windy favours
In such account, that popularity
Is the one insult I have never suffered.

MAFFIO

[aside]

He has enough of hate, if he needs that.

DUKE

Have prudence; in your dealings with the world
Be not too hasty; act on the second thought,
First impulses are generally good.

GUIDO

[aside]

Surely a toad sits on his lips, and spills its venom there.