

THE TWO FOSCARI
(Play)

Woman/Man
Drama/Tragedy

MARINA

I have ventured, father, on your privacy.

DOGE

I have none from you, my child.
Command my time, when not commanded by the state.

MARINA

I wish'd to speak to you of him.

DOGE

Your husband?

MARINA

And your son.

DOGE

Proceed, my daughter!

MARINA

I had obtain'd permission from "the Ten"
To attend my husband for a limited number of hours.

DOGE

You had so.

MARINA

'Tis revoked.

DOGE

By whom?

MARINA

"The Ten."--When we had reach'd "the Bridge of Sighs ,"
Which I prepared to pass with Foscari,
The gloomy guardian of that passage first
Demurr'd: a messenger was sent back to
"The Ten;"--but as the court no longer sate,
And no permission had been given in writing,
I was thrust back, with the assurance that
Until that high tribunal reassembled
The dungeon walls must still divide us.

DOGE

True, the form has been omitted in the haste
With which the court adjourn'd; and till it meets,
'Tis dubious.

MARINA

Till it meets! and when it meets,
They'll torture him again; and he and I
Must purchase by renewal of the rack
The interview of husband and of wife,

The holiest tie beneath the heavens!--Oh God!
Dost thou see this?

DOGE
Child--child--

MARINA
(abruptly). Call me not "child!"
You soon will have no children--you deserve none--
You, who can talk thus calmly of a son
In circumstances which would call forth tears
Of blood from Spartans! Though these did not weep
Their boys who died in battle, is it written
That they beheld them perish piecemeal, nor
Stretch'd forth a hand to save them?

DOGE
You behold me:
I cannot weep--I would I could; but if
Each white hair on this head were a young life,
This ducal cap the diadem of earth,
This ducal ring with which I wed the waves
A talisman to still them--I'd give all for him.

MARINA
With less he surely might be saved.

DOGE
That answer only shows you know not Venice .
Alas! how should you? she knows not herself,
In all her mystery. Hear me--they who aim
At Foscari, aim no less at his father;
The sire's destruction would not save the son;
They work by different means to the same end,
And that is--but they have not conquer'd yet.

MARINA
But thy have crush'd.

DOGE
Nor crush'd as yet--I live.

MARINA
And your son,--how long will he live?

DOGE
I trust, for all that yet is past, as many years
And happier than his father. The rash boy,
With womanish impatience to return,
Hath ruin'd all by that detected letter:
A high crime, which I neither can deny
Nor palliate, as parent or as Duke:
Had he but borne a little, little longer

His Candiote exile, I had hopes--he has quench'd them--
He must return.

MARINA
To exile?

DOGE
I have said it.

MARINA
And can I not go with him?

DOGE
You well know this prayer of yours was twice denied before
By the assembled "Ten," and hardly now
Will be accorded to a third request,
Since aggravated errors on the part
Of your lord renders them still more austere.

MARINA
Austere? Atrocious! The old human fiends,
With one foot in the grave, with dim eyes, strange
To tears save drops of dotage, with long white
And scanty hairs, and shaking hands, and heads
As palsied as their hearts are hard, they counsel,
Cabal, and put men's lives out, as if life
Were no more than the feelings long extinguish'd
In their accursed bosoms.

DOGE
You know not--

MARINA
I do--I do--and so should you, methinks--
That these are demons: could it be else that
Men, who have been of women born and suckled--
Who have loved, or talk'd at least of love--have given
Their hands in sacred vows--have danced their babes
Upon their knees, perhaps have mourn'd above them--
In pain, in peril, or in death--who are,
Or were at least in seeming, human, could
Do as they have done by yours, and you yourself--
You who abet them?

DOGE
I forgive this, for you know not what you say.

MARINA
You know it well,
And feel it nothing.

DOGE
I have borne so much,

That words have ceased to shake me.

MARINA

Oh, no doubt!

You have seen your son's blood flow, and your flesh shook not;

And after that, what are a woman's words?

No more than woman's tears, that they should shake you.

DOGE

Woman, this clamorous grief of thine, I tell thee,

Is no more in the balance weigh'd with that

Which--but I pity thee, my poor Marina!

MARINA

Pity my husband, or I cast it from me;

Pity thy son! Thou pity!--'tis a word

Strange to thy heart--how came it on thy lips?

DOGE

I must bear these reproaches, though they wrong me.

Couldst thou but read--

MARINA

'Tis not upon thy brow,

Nor in thine eyes, nor in thine acts,--where then

Should I behold this sympathy? or shall?

DOGE

(pointing downwards). There.

MARINA

In the earth?

DOGE

To which I am tending: when

It lies upon this heart, far lightlier, though

Loaded with marble, than the thoughts which press it

Now, you will know me better.

MARINA

Are you, then, indeed, thus to be pitied?

DOGE

Pitied! None shall ever use that base word, with which men
Cloak their soul's hoarded triumph, as a fit one

To mingle with my name; that name shall be,

As far as I have borne it, what it was

When I received it.

MARINA

But for the poor children

Of him thou canst not, or thou wilt not save,

You were the last to bear it.

DOGE

Would it were so!
Better for him he never had been born;
Better for me.--I have seen our house dishonour'd.

MARINA

That's false! A truer, nobler, trustier heart,
More loving, or more loyal, never beat
Within a human breast. I would not change
My exiled, persecuted, mangled husband,
Oppress'd but not disgraced, crush'd, overwhelm'd,
Alive, or dead, for prince or paladin
In story or in fable, with a world
To back his suit. Dishonour'd!--he dishonour'd!
I tell thee, Doge, 'tis Venice is dishonour'd;
His name shall be her foulest, worst reproach,
For what he suffers, not for what he did.
'Tis ye who are all traitors, tyrant!--ye!
Did you but love your country like this victim
Who totters back in chains to tortures, and
Submits to all things rather than to exile,
You'd fling yourselves before him, and implore
His grace for your enormous guilt.

DOGE

He was indeed all you have said. I better bore
The deaths of the two sons Heaven took from me,
Than Jacopo's disgrace.

MARINA

That word again?

DOGE

Has he not been condemn'd?

MARINA

Is none but guilt so?

DOGE

Time may restore his memory--I would hope so.
He was my pride, my--but 'tis useless now--
I am not given to tears, but wept for joy
When he was born: those drops were ominous.

MARINA

I say he's innocent! And were he not so,
Is our own blood and kin to shrink from us
In fatal moments?

DOGE

I shrank not from him:

But I have other duties than a father's;
The state would not dispense me from those duties;
Twice I demanded it, but was refused:
They must then be fulfill'd.