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THE

WIDOW'S VOW.

A

FARCE,

IN TWO ACTS,

AS IT IS ACTED

AT THE THEATRE ROYAL,

HAY-MARKET.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR C. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATER-NOSTER ROW.
1786.

PROLOGUE,

Written by Mr. HOLCROFT,

Spoken by Mr. BANNISTER, jun.

Prologues, with caustic touch, have often tried
To probe your spleen, prove knaves and fools allied;
Have twisted words and wit ten thousand ways,
To shew that these are most degenerate days!

A different task be ours.—We'll prove that you
Are wise and happy. Nay! tho' strange, 'tis true!

First on your *safety* think! now belles appear
By ample bulwarks guarded, front and rear!
Now male and female amble, side by side,
Exempt from harm, by breast-works fortify'd!
Here polygons defend Miss Molly's breast!
There horn-works hush the husband's fears to rest
By ramparts, daily rais'd, he's freed from cares;
If he'll but grant sufficient for repairs.

Our strength thus prov'd, proceed we to disclose

How new-made wealth thro' new-made channels flows!
How rich we are, in medal-rust and rare things!
In copper coins, gilt pence and—Queen-Anne-farthings!
How shells, stuff'd monkies, and Cremonas old,
In hand of Auctioneer, are current gold!
He "Going! going!" cries. "The hammer's up!
"This fine antique! this Roman—*caudle-cup!*"
A gem so rare makes connoisseurs turn pale,
Fearful, alike, to purchase or to fail!
Hope trembles, starts, from lip to lip rebounds,
'Till down she's knock'd by—Ah!—one thousand pounds!
The envied purchaser, with joy elate,
Pays for his prize by—selling his estate!
While *Smirk*, in florid style, words nicely plac'd,
Protests thee lot does, *anner* to his taste! (*Mimicking.*)

Yes! sure you're happy! and should rest content,
Now landscapes are reduced fifteen per cent:
And Claude's and Titian's new-found wonders may
By new-made Peers be bought—if new-made Peers can pay.

(*Assuming sorrow.*)

One thing, indeed, may well your peace invade,
Pawnbrokers! threaten you to leave off trade! (*Weeps.*)

(*Returning to his former chearful tone.*)

All things considered, now, while safety smiles,
And wealth inundates thus our Queen of isles;
While Vickery head defects so soon repairs,
And half unpeoples Greenland of her bears;
While exhibitions, galas and reviews,
Lisle-street, Vauxhall, the Abbey, Handel, Hughes,
Flutes, fiddles, trombos, double-drums, bassoons,
Mara, the speaking-figure, fish-balloons,
Earth-baths, live-eagles, such as never flew,
L'Hercule du Roy! and General Jackoo!
While these create a round of such delight,
Sure, we may hope, you will not frown to-night!
While farces numerous as these go down,
Our farce may in its turn amuse the town;
And, smiling thus on Folly's vast career,
Sure not on us, alone, you'll be severe!

ADVERTISEMENT.

The AUTHOR of the WIDOW'S VOW is indebted for the Plot of her Piece, and for the Plot only, to *L'Hereuse Erreur*, a French Comedy of one Act, by M. PATRAT, but to the Excellence of the English Performers alone is she indebted for its very flattering Success.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Don Antonio, Mr. PARSONS.
Marquis, Mr. BANNISTER, jun.
Carlos, Mr. R. PALMER.
Servant, Mr. LYON.
Jerome, Mr. EDWIN.

Countess, Mrs. BATES.
Donna Isabella, Mrs. RILEY.
Inis, Miss BRANCIN.
Ursula, Mrs. EDWIN.
Flora, Mrs. WELLS.

Scene a Village in Spain.

THE

WIDOW'S VOW.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Hall in a Castle.

Enter JEROME and FLORA.

FLORA. I Can't go at present, Mr. Jerome, for I expect my Lady every moment to ring, and if I should be out of the way she will be angry; and as I am but new in her service—

JEROME. She angry! Oh you don't know her yet—When you have been a day or two with her you'll find she is never angry—She is the best tempered creature—and were it not for her aversion to us men, she would not have a fault.

FLORA. Do you consider that as a fault, Mr. Jerome?

JEROME. To be sure I do—For my part, I think she had much better be too fond of us, as the rest of her sex are.

FLORA. Pray, Mr. Jerome, what caused her aversion to the men?

JEROME. I'll tell you, Flora, if it wo'nt make you melancholy.

FLORA. Oh, no, Mr. Jerome—I like a melancholy story—I like dearly to cry, when it is not on my own account.

JEROME. Well then—When my Lady was only fifteen she fell deep in love with a fine handsome young fellow, inferior to her both in rank and fortune; but my good old Lord, her father, who doated upon her, was afraid a disappointment might break her heart, and so consented to her having him; but he proved so bad a husband that my poor old Master soon died with grief.

FLORA. Poor man!

JEROME. Don't cry yet, there's something worse to come—My Lady, on this, took such a dislike to her husband, that he died of grief too.

FLORA. Indeed, Mr. Jerome, this is very moving. (*cries.*)

JEROME. On this—

FLORA. I hope there is nothing worse to come?

JEROME. On this, my Lady made a vow to shut herself up from the whole sex.

FLORA. Well, that is more affecting than any of it.

JEROME. And she immediately retired to this lonely castle, where, except the house of Donna Isabella next door, we have not a neighbour for miles; and even there we are strangers—for my part I have never so much as seen Donna Isabella, or exchanged a word with any of the servants since they came to the place—though indeed they have not been

here above eight days.

FLORA. But how long has my Lady kept this vow of avoiding all your sex?

JEROME. Eighteen months.

FLORA. Eighteen weeks! what a time!

JEROME. Months.

FLORA. Months! she has certainly lost her senses.

JEROME. Not she.

FLORA. O but I am sure she must have lost some of them.

JEROME. I tell you no.—But I must leave you now, Mrs. Flora, for yonder is Don Antonio, and I believe he is coming this way.

FLORA. I thought no man was admitted into the castle but you, Mr. Jerome?

JEROME. Yes; Don Antonio lives here—but then he is my Lady's uncle; and you know there can be no fear of her falling in love with him, as he is a relation.

FLORA. But *you* are no relation, Mr. Jerome.

JEROME. Why, as you say, she might fall in love with me—Stranger things have happened—and to tell you the truth, she does not seem positive she shan't, for she bids me keep out of her sight as much as possible, for fear I should put her in mind of that handsome villain that brought her to this retirement.

FLORA. Here comes the old Gentleman!

JEROME. Then I must go, for he'll be wanting to say something to you—he is for ever running after all the maids—I am sorry to leave you—I am, indeed, Flora; indeed I am—Oh it would be a happy thing for me if I could bring myself to care as little for the women, as my Lady does for the men. [Exit Jerome.]

FLORA. A fine sweetheart, truly, I have got—and if this old fright proves another, I'll be even with him.

Enter ANTONIO—She courtesys

ANTONIO. Hah!—what!—what is all this!—what have we here?—what have we here?—a pretty girl—a very pretty girl indeed!—My niece's new maid, I suppose—Aye, aye, I had the other sent about her business—She must be like her mistress forsooth, and have nothing to say to a man—(*going up to Flora*) My dear, come this way—I think your's is a new face—

FLORA. Yes, Sir—and I think your's is an old one.

ANTONIO. Hem—hem.—Pray what is your name?

FLORA. A very good name—and I intend never to change it for a bad one.—

ANTONIO. Look in my face—What do you blush for?

FLORA. For you.

ANTONIO. Come, come, no pertness—but let me bid you welcome to the castle. (*offers to salute her.*)

FLORA. No, indeed you shan't.

ANTONIO. I will bid you welcome to the castle. (*after a struggle he salutes her.*)

FLORA. Upon my word, Sir, you are very rude—How would you like I should serve *you* so?

ANTONIO. Do—Do—serve me so—you are very welcome.

Enter JEROME.

JEROME. Flora, there's a young woman at the gate, who says she lives with Donna Isabella, and wants to speak to you upon some particular business—Can your Honor spare her with no inconvenience to yourself?

ANTONIO. Yes—Yes—she may go—(*Exit Flora and Jerome*) A young woman at the gate, now do I want to bid *her* welcome to the castle—a maid of Donna Isabella, our neighbour—by the bye I must bring about an acquaintance with Donna Isabella and the Countess my niece, if I can, for I am told Isabella is a very beautiful lady—and I should like to bid *her* welcome to the castle—but, notwithstanding all the pains I have taken, ever since she has arrived, to procure a sight of her, I have not been able—I would, however, force myself into the house, but it seems she has a young brother, the Marquis, come down on a visit to her within these three days, and he might take upon him to resent my gallantry—and I can't say I am fond of resentments, rage and hatred—no, no, the *softer* passions possess me wholly. [*Exit.*

SCENE II.

A Chamber at DONNA ISABELLA'S.

Enter ISABELLA followed by the MARQUIS.

MARQUIS. But my dear sister, did not you seduce me to this melancholy spot, on a promise that you would procure me an introduction to the rich widow, the charming Countess?—Interest first prompted my wishes, but since I have beheld her, it is love.

ISABEL. Beheld her!

MARQUIS. Yes, beheld her—walking in her garden—sitting negligently in an arbor.

ISABEL. But how?—How contrive to see her?—

MARQUIS. From the top of our house, through a telescope—but, my dear sister, do bring us a little nearer, or I'll purchase a speaking trumpet, and make love to her through it, though my passion be heard by every soul within a quarter of a mile.

ISABEL. I tell you I have great hopes.

MARQUIS. But why not accept of her acquaintance, and prevail on her yourself to see me?

ISABEL. I tell you again, the letters I expect from her uncle at Madrid will have more weight than volumes I could say—She dare not disobey him, and *must* see you.

MARQUIS. And yet I would not compel her to it—Unless she consents to my acquaintance freely, without being

constrained by force, or deceived by stratagem, I had rather have recourse to the top of the house and my telescope again.

ISABEL. Do not let your scrupulous honor overcome all your future prospects—Notwithstanding these letters will strongly recommend you, yet it will be with her own consent only she will yield to the recommendation.

MARQUIS. But when do you expect the letters?

ISABEL. Every instant—my servants are now gone to the Post office.

MARQUIS. I'll fly and see if they are returned.

ISABEL. Do; for as soon as the letters are arrived, I would not have you lose a moment but away, and know your fate at once—yet if she will but see you I think with such a person as your's, there can be little to fear.

MARQUIS. But they tell me she is so austere since this rigid vow—so awful—she will petrify me with a look.

ISABEL. Pshaw—away, and see if the letters are come.

MARQUIS. I will, and if they are, and I gain admittance, I'm resolved I will obtain you a husband within a week, in return, my dear sister, for your kindness to me. [Exit Marquis.]

Enter INIS.

ISABEL. Well, Inis—I am impatient to hear—What success?

INIS. Delightful, Madam—I have been introduced to the young Countess—I first communicated the intelligence of the pretended plot forming against her to her waiting-woman, who was sufficiently alarmed at it, to take me to her Lady immediately.

ISABEL. Well.

INIS. And so, Madam, as soon as I was introduced I fell a crying—I thought that was the best way.

ISABEL. Very well.

INIS. And then, before I discovered what I had to say, I made her promise not to betray me, which she did most solemnly, and without the least reluctance—and now, Madam, says I, I live servant with your neighbour, Donna Isabella, a flighty Lady, who turns every thing serious and sacred into ridicule; and she has resolved to make sport of you for pretending an aversion to men, and for that purpose she has procured recommendations for you to receive the visits of the young Marquis her brother, but instead of him, she purposes to come herself, disguised as a man, prevail on you to consent to be married to her, and then throw off the mask, and make you and your vow the jest of the whole kingdom.

ISABEL. This is all right—go on.

INIS. On this she thanked me a thousand times for the discovery.

ISABEL. But did she say she would receive me?

INIS. Oh yes—she has promised to receive you on my account, that my divulging the scheme may not be detected.

ISABEL. And she is absolutely resolved to receive *me* under the title of my brother?

INIS. You may depend upon it—but how are you to proceed now?

ISABEL. Send my brother to her immediately.

INIS. Your brother!

ISABEL. Yes—The Countess, from what you have told her, will suppose him a woman, receive him, and consequently suffer a thousand endearing familiarities; till, charmed by the graces of his mind and person, she shall love him without *knowing* it, and, when she detects the impostor, be unable to part with him.

INIS. And if she is like me, she'll think it the happiest day of her life—but have you prepared your brother how to act his part?

ISABEL. He has nothing to *act*, being the very person he represents, and therefore shall not know of the art by which he is introduced—for, except being a little too attentive to dress and etiquette, a circumstance which, with his youthful appearance, favours our design, he is one of the most amiable young men in the world, and the least idea of imposition would shock his honour, and put an end to my scheme.

INIS. Then he is not to know he is to be taken for a woman.

ISABEL. Certainly not—Hush, here he is, now for my credentials. (*taking out letters from her pocket.*)

Enter MARQUIS.

MARQUIS. Oh, my dear sister, there are no letters arrived.

ISABEL. Yes, here they are—(*Gives a packet of letters*) my maid has just brought them me.

MARQUIS. O with what joy I receive them—they are all right?—There will be no mistake I hope?—Nothing to make me appear ridiculous?—I would not appear ridiculous for the world.

ISABEL. All is right—No, no.

MARQUIS. They are addressed to her uncle!

ISABEL. Yes, because it will be far more delicate to be introduced through his means—but there is one enclosed to her.

MARQUIS. D'ye think she'll see me?

ISABEL. Yes; I dare say—There is little doubt of it.

INIS. By my dream last night, I'd lay my life she will.

MARQUIS. Why, what did you dream?

INIS. I dreamt she ordered her servants to drag your Lordship by force out of the house, and duck you in the great fish-pond for a whole hour.

MARQUIS. Is that a sign?—

INIS. O yes—Dreams always go by contraries.

MARQUIS. (*Going, returns.*) But I know she is so haughty and reserved, that, *should* she admit me, I shall appear confused and awkward.—

INIS. So much the better—she expects you'll be awkward.

MARQUIS. Expects I shall be awkward!

ISABEL. Pshaw, pshaw—Hesitate no longer with your fears, but away—you know your first court must be to the uncle, and when you have been a little time in the house your apprehensions will vanish.—Away, away.

MARQUIS. But if she should not condescend to see me?

INIS. Oh, my Lord, you may depend upon it she will, because of my dream.

(Exit Marquis on one side and Isabella and Inis on the other.)

SCENE III.

The Hall in the Castle.

Enter FLORA and JEROME.

FLORA. Ha, ha, ha, ha.

JEROME. Ha, ha, ha, ha—But is all this matter of fact?

FLORA. As true as I am alive, Jerome—I have done nothing but laugh ever since I heard it—But do you think, Jerome, she'll be drest all over like a man?

JEROME. To be sure.

FLORA. What, every thing?

JEROME. Yes—Every thing—Egad, I long to have a peep at her!

FLORA. Aye, and so would Antonio too, if he knew.—

JEROME. Aye, that he would—he'd be so fond of the young Marquis there would be no keeping him away from her—but he does not know of it, you say?

FLORA. No; no soul knows of it yet but my Lady and I, and now I have told it to you; and I am to tell it to all the servants as soon as she comes, that they may not think my Lady has broken her vow, by admitting a man—Lord, I wonder how I should look in men's clothes!

JEROME. There's the Priest's old great cloak, doublet, and jack-boots hanging up behind that door, if you have a mind to try, and I'll step out of the way till you have put them on.

(A loud rapping at the door.)

FLORA. Here she is—Here she is—Oh dear—Oh dear—how ashamed I am for her.

JEROME. And I wish I may die if so ben't I.

(Covering his eyes.)

FLORA. And yet somehow I long to see her!

(Another rapping.)

FLORA. Run, Jerome, run.

JEROME. This moment (*turning back*) but I am so afraid I shall laugh.

FLORA. O no—Don't laugh—if you do you will spoil all, and my Lady will never forgive you.

JEROME. Well—I won't—I won't, if I can help it—I'll look so—just so, if I can—as serious as a judge—will that do? (*looking serious.*)

FLORA. Yes; that will do. (*Rapping again.*)

JEROME. (*Going.*) Ha, ha, ha, ha—I can't help laughing a little though—but not before her—I'll be as serious as a judge before her. (*aside*) Egad I am afraid—I am afraid I shall laugh.

(*Exit, stifling a laugh.*)

FLORA. Now where shall I run to have a peep at her?—in here.

[*Exit Flora.*

Enter JEROME, bowing before the MARQUIS, with his face on one side, as if he was afraid to look at him for fear he should laugh.

MARQUIS. Let Don Antonio know I have letters for him.

JEROME. Yes, your Honour—Lordship. (*Lifting up his eyes, looking at him with side glances, and with difficulty stifling a laugh.*) Your Honour, your Lordship—Let Don Antonio—know—you—have—letters—for—him. (*Suppressing a laugh.*)

MARQUIS. Yes; is not that plain?

JEROME. Yes. (*still suppressing a laugh.*) And he'll be very glad to wait upon your Honour.

[*Laughs right out and exit.*

MARQUIS. A strange fellow this—How my heart beats!

FLORA. (*from a door.*) Oh that she would but turn this way, that I might see her face—Oh the impudent slut.

Enter JEROME with a grin on his face.

JEROME. Noble Lord, Don Antonio will be here immediately. (*Then laughs and stares at him from head to foot.*) Here he is.

Enter ANTONIO.

(*The Marquis bows very respectfully whilst Jerome is laughing and making faces behind.*)

MARQUIS. Letters, my Lord, from your brother at Madrid.

ANTONIO. Signior. (*Taking the letters.*)

MARQUIS. (*aside while Antonio reads.*) Heavens, whence this palpitation? If such are the feelings of my bosom on knowing myself in the same house with her, what must be my agitation on a nearer approach!

ANTONIO. My letters inform me it is the Marquis who does me the honour of this visit—My Lord, your Lordship—

JEROME. Ha, ha, ha.

ANTONIO. What's the matter with you?

JEROME. Sir, I was only—

ANTONIO. Only what? Leave the room.

JEROME. (*Aside.*) Well I thought the old Don would have found out a woman in any disguise. [*Exit.*

ANTONIO. My Lord, you may command my services and friendship, but I fear you will not rate them so highly as I could wish, as you must be debarred the acquaintance and society of my niece—You are no stranger to the vow she has taken?

MARQUIS. I am not—and yet I flatter myself the manner in which I am spoken of in these letters—

ANTONIO. Be certain, Sir, my niece shall receive them, urged with all my authority for an interview. Will your Lordship take a turn in the garden while I deliver them and enforce their contents?

MARQUIS. I will—and should you prove successful, Don Antonio, I shall ever retain the deepest sense of the obligation. [*Exit Marquis.*

Enter the COUNTESS.

ANTONIO. Niece, I was this moment coming to you, to bring you these letters from your uncle at Madrid, which you will find recommend, in the strongest manner, to your acquaintance, no other than the young Marquis our neighbour—as fine a youth as ever I saw.

COUNTESS. Ha, ha, ha—is he arrived?—

ANTONIO. Now in the house—What is the matter?—Did you hear of his intended visit?

COUNTESS. Yes—Ha, ha, ha—how does he look?

ANTONIO. Delightfully—I don't think I ever saw a handsomer man.

COUNTESS. *Man!*—Ha, ha, ha, I dare say he looks a little awkward?

ANTONIO. Aukward! No; he is as elegant in his deportment, and as fine, as finished a young fellow as ever I saw.

COUNTESS. (*After looking over the letter.*) Certainly, I shall comply with my uncle's request—Let his Lordship be admitted.

ANTONIO. Niece, I always knew you could not keep your vow—I always knew the very first man that came in your way—crash it would go directly, but let me persuade you to break it by degrees, and not let the world say you made no struggle first.

COUNTESS. Struggle! Now, my dear Uncle, with all your deep discernment, particularly in regard to our sex, to see you at last imposed upon delights me.

ANTONIO. Imposed upon!

COUNTESS. Yes; for this self-same Marquis is a woman.

ANTONIO. A woman!

COUNTESS. Yes; this "fine, elegant creature."

ANTONIO. That is, then, the very reason why I thought her so—"a fine creature,"—now that is intuition, instinct, love without knowing it—But, my dear niece, are you sure you are right? Are you sure you don't deceive me? Don't disappoint me—I can't bear a disappointment in a matter like this—I am vastly pleased, and a disappointment might be fatal.

COUNTESS. I assure you again a woman—sister to the Marquis—and has undertaken this scheme purely to make love to me, and turn me into ridicule.

ANTONIO. Now I think of it again, she *was* devilish awkward—and I believe wore her sword on the wrong side.

COUNTESS. It is she herself depend upon it.

ANTONIO. To be sure it is—and I'll be hang'd if it did not strike me to be a woman the moment I laid my eyes on her—for she came up to me slipping and sliding, and tossing her head, just as the fine ladies do. (*Mimicks.*) Well—But what do you intend to do? I know what I intend to do.

COUNTESS. I shall carry on the scheme, and pretend to be deceived, till I turn the joke she designs for me, on herself.

ANTONIO. Yes; and I intend to have *my* joke too.

COUNTESS. But you must keep the secret.

ANTONIO. I wo'nt say a word.

COUNTESS. Take his Lordship into the saloon, and I'll wait upon him immediately.

ANTONIO. Aye, my dear—and you need not be in a hurry—Egad, I like the joke of all things.

[*Exit.*]

Enter JEROME and FLORA.

FLORA. Dear my Lady, have you seen her?

COUNTESS. Not yet.

FLORA. Well, I declare she looks as like a man!

COUNTESS. I shall certainly laugh in her face.

JEROME. Oh no, don't laugh—Never give your mind to laughing—I did not even smile, but kept my countenance as steady—just thus—Did not I, Flora? Oh—'tis such a weakness to laugh—Look just so—as I do now—

COUNTESS. I must away to the trial, however—come with me to the door, Flora.

JEROME. And be sure you don't laugh—Think on me, and keep your countenance—if you can.

(Exit Countess and Flora on one side and Jerome on the other.)

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The Hall in the Castle.

Enter FLORA.

Dear me, what a pretty footman she has brought with her!—he made me such a fine bow as I past—and looked so grand—here he is.

Enter CARLOS and bows—She courtesies.

FLORA. O Lord, I hope this is not a woman too! but I dare say it is—Lord what a pity! but I'll talk to him, and I shall soon be able to find out—and if he does not fall in love with me, I'll conclude it can't be a man. *[aside.*

CARLOS. A very pretty girl. *(aside.)* Your humble servant, my dear angel.

FLORA. Too conceited for a man. *(aside.)*

CARLOS. May I venture, on so slight an acquaintance to protest to you—

FLORA. No—he protests—'tis a man. *[aside.*

CARLOS. Permit me to assure you—

FLORA. Sir!

CARLOS. What thus takes up your attention?

FLORA. A doubt I have.

CARLOS. Do you entertain any doubts of me?

FLORA. Yes—Indeed I do.

CARLOS. What are they?

FLORA. I have been trying to put this bunch of ribbons into a right form for my Lady's hair, and I hardly know how.

CARLOS. Let me try. (*She gives the ribbons.*)

FLORA. Now shall I see by the dexterity, whether it is a woman or not.

[*aside.*]

CARLOS. There—I'll be hanged if I have not done it to a nicety. (*Returns the ribbons.*)

FLORA. 'Tis a woman, pshaw.

(*Aside and sighing.*)

CARLOS. Now I must beg a kiss for my pains.

(*Kisses her.*)

FLORA. No—it must be a man.

CARLOS. My charming—

FLORA. For Heaven's sake go about your business, for here comes a fellow-servant of mine.

CARLOS. I am going into the grove, will you come there presently?

FLORA. Yes—perhaps I may—only begone now.

CARLOS. But you'll come?

FLORA. Yes—I think I will.

CARLOS. I shall wait for you.

[*Exit.*]

Enter URSULA.

URSULA. So, Mrs. Flora, I give you joy of your new sweetheart—For shame, for shame, I saw what passed.

FLORA. Lord bless you—it is only a woman.

URSULA. A woman!

FLORA. Aye, in men's clothes, like the master, and so there could be no harm you know.

URSULA. I did not know the servant was a woman too!

FLORA. Why, I am not sure of it—but I thought so when I let him kiss me, and I thought so when I promised to meet him in the grove—and I will e'en go—for I dare say 'tis only a woman.

URSULA. Aye, now I think of it again, I am sure it is not a man—Do you suppose a Lady in disguise, would take a man-servant to attend her?

FLORA. Very true; and I wish, Ursula, you would go instead of me to the grove, for I am so busy just at this time—

URSULA. And yet old Jerome says, and I never knew Jerome mistaken in my life, he says it is a man—however, *I* am not afraid of him if it is, and I *will* go instead of you.

FLORA. No, Ursula—I will go after all—for if it *should* prove a man, and he should behave rude to you, oh! my dear Ursula, I should never be happy, that I did not take it all upon myself.

[*Exeunt separately.*]

SCENE II.

A Parlour in the Castle.

The COUNTESS, the MARQUIS, and DON ANTONIO discovered sitting.

ANTONIO. And so, my Lord, you once thought of the army—Do you think you should stand your ground in a battle.
(*Laughing to himself.*)

MARQUIS. Sir! (*Surprized.*)

ANTONIO. (*Aside.*) Damn me but she has a good leg.

COUNTESS. Your Lordship seems formed for the service of a softer Deity; an occupation less perilous than that of war.

ANTONIO. Aye, that you do.

MARQUIS. Pardon me, Madam, the Deity you allude to, I fear may be yet more fatal, unless you will kindly fight on my side.

ANTONIO. Ha, ha, ha, I can't help laughing to think what a pretty soldier you would make—You look vastly like a soldier to be sure.—Ha, ha, ha.

MARQUIS. Why not, Sir? (*Angrily.*)

ANTONIO. Nay, no offence—Damn me if I should not like to command a whole regiment of you—and I would go upon some new achievements—For instance, say the enemy were Hotten-tots, I would undertake to poison them all by the scent of perfumes from my army—or in case of a repulse, would engage at any time to raise a mist, and escape pursuit, only by commanding every man to shake his head, and discharge the powder.

MARQUIS. Upon my word, Sir, you are very pleasant. (*Forcing a smile.*)

ANTONIO. I am very glad your Lordship thinks so.

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT. (*To Antonio.*) Sir, you are wanted by a gentleman in the parlour.

ANTONIO. Pshaw—I'm busy—Who is it?—(*Servant whispers.*) Well then I must come. (*Exit Servant.*) My Lord I take my leave for a minute, but I shall soon be back. (*Aside.*) How like a man she looks—Impudent hussey. [*Exit.*]

MARQUIS. Your uncle's behaviour, Madam, has something in it rather extraordinary—I hope I have not in any means offended him?

COUNTESS. I can conceal my knowledge of her no longer. (*Aside.*) Oh no, my dear, not at all.

MARQUIS. My dear! (*Aside.*)

COUNTESS. I declare I like you so well—so much better than I expected—I can no longer treat you with cold reserve—Come sit down. (*They sit.*)

MARQUIS. How kind is this! (*Drawing his chair near to her.*)

COUNTESS. (*Looking at him from head to foot.*) Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. I protest I can't help laughing—Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

MARQUIS. Ha, ha, ha, ha—I protest no more can I—Sure fate directed me to this heavenly spot, where ceremony has no share in politeness.

COUNTESS. And did you suppose I should use any ceremony with such a sweet, sweet fellow as you?

MARQUIS. Egad, I'll use no ceremony either. (*Aside.*) Thus, on my knees, let me pour my thanks.

COUNTESS. Oh you artful creature! (*Stroking his cheek.*)

MARQUIS. Art! I disclaim it—and so do you.—You are all pure nature.

COUNTESS. Well, I positively do think you one of the cleverest of your whole sex.

MARQUIS. Thank you—Thank you—my dearest creature. (*Kissing her hand.*)

COUNTESS. So negligent—so easy—not the least awkward or embarrassed!

MARQUIS. Egad, I think you as little embarrassed to the full. (*Aside.*) My dear Madam, your charming society has inspired me. (*Salutes her.*)

COUNTESS. Now, if you were really a *man*, what would you *deserve* for that?

MARQUIS. Madam! (*Astonished.*)

COUNTESS. I say, if you were *really* a man, what would you deserve for that freedom?

MARQUIS. *Really* a man! Why?—What?—Don't I look like a man?

COUNTESS. Yes—that you do—and a sweet pretty man—Come, come, don't be frightened—shake hands—I forgive you—forgive you all your impertinence—and, carry the jest as far as you will, I am resolved not to be angry.

MARQUIS. I am very much obliged to you—ininitely obliged to you—I assure you this favour—this honour.—I don't know what to say—She absolutely puts me out of countenance. (*Aside.*)

COUNTESS. What confused?—Come, resume your gaiety—Come, come—

MARQUIS. Come, come, then. (*seizing her.*)

Enter DON ANTONIO.

ANTONIO. Hah!—What! Struggling?

COUNTESS. Oh, Uncle, I have been so ill-used by this Gentleman, that I must beg you will resent his behaviour.

MARQUIS. How!

ANTONIO. Certainly, my dear, if you *have* been used ill.

COUNTESS. Most scandalously—Frighten her a little. (*Aside to Antonio.*)

MARQUIS. Upon my honour, Sir—

ANTONIO. Zounds, Sir, my niece is one of the most reserved, prudent young women—and whosoever offers an insult to her, it is my place, and consistent but with my honour, to resent it.—How white she looks. (*Aside.*)

MARQUIS. Sir, I shall not draw my sword before the Countess, and therefore I beg you will put up your's.

ANTONIO. And so I will, my poor Lady—I see it has frightened you—Here, Niece, have you any hartshorn or drops at hand—the poor thing is terrified out of her life. Come, come, my poor little creature—Poor thing—Poor rogue. (*He goes up to sooth him, and the Marquis gives him a blow.*)

MARQUIS. Don Antonio, this insolence shall receive the correction it deserves. (*Draws.*)

COUNTESS. She is not in earnest, sure. (*Aside.*)

ANTONIO. I have received many a blow from a Lady, but never such a one as this!

MARQUIS. Do you dare to call me a Lady again, Sir?

ANTONIO. A Lady, oh no—you are a tyger, a fury—

MARQUIS. I never met with such usage!—Damnation!

ANTONIO. What a profligate she is! I did not think such a word could come out of a woman's mouth!

MARQUIS. How, Sir!—Dare to say that again, and I'll nail you to the wall.

ANTONIO. (*Retreating.*) Why, what is all this about? I won't fight—I only drew my sword to frighten you.

MARQUIS. To frighten me!—Did you think I was to be frightened?

ANTONIO. Why not? You see I am.

MARQUIS. Yes, I see, and scorn you for it.

COUNTESS. Why, Uncle, the tables are fairly turned upon you.

ANTONIO. Yes, Niece, and I'm much obliged to you, for your advice in the business—But you may depend upon it, I shall take care how I attempt to frighten one of your sex again. (*Going.*)

MARQUIS. Come back, Sir, I insist upon your coming back, and recalling what you have said—I insist upon your begging me pardon for your impertinent insinuation.—

ANTONIO. What insinuation?—That I think you a female?—I am sure there is no offence meant in that—for, when I suppose you a woman, I suppose you what I like better than anything in the world; what I am never happy without; and what I even make myself poor, despised, and ridiculous, in the daily pursuit of.

MARQUIS. And pray, Sir, in what, do I appear like a woman?

ANTONIO. And pray, Sir, in what, does any of our modern coxcombs appear like a man? and yet they don't scruple to call themselves men.

MARQUIS. Then you will not recall your sentiments and beg my pardon?

ANTONIO. Beg your pardon?—No—Yes, yes—Put on your petticoats, and I'll fall at your feet as soon as you please.—

MARQUIS. I'll bear this no longer—Draw. (*Marquis draws.*)

ANTONIO. Here Jerome, Jerome, come and defend me, where it would be a dishonour to defend myself.

Enter JEROME.

ANTONIO. See, Jerome, how my life is assailed.

JEROME. Aye, your Honour, I always told you the women would be the death of you at last.

MARQUIS. You too, rascal!—

JEROME. Well, I declare with her sword in her hand, she is as fine a creature as ever I saw!—Oh you audacious minx.

MARQUIS. Scoundrel—

JEROME. Sure, your Honour, she must be the Maid of Orleans.

MARQUIS. I am no maid, Sir.

JEROME. I am sorry for your misfortune.

MARQUIS. Don Antonio, this treatment I suppose you inflict as a just recompence for my presumption in daring to hope for an alliance in your family, spite of the prejudice which I knew the Countess had conceived—I cannot deny the justice of the accusation—I came into her house with the vain hope——

COUNTESS. By no means *vain*—I am ready to comply, be your hopes what they will.

MARQUIS. Can I believe what you say real?

COUNTESS. Certainly—Were you going to say you hoped to marry me? If you were, call the Priest, and we'll be married immediately.

ANTONIO. Aye, if that is what your Lordship wants, the Priest shall tack you together in five minutes.

MARQUIS. This sudden consent staggers me—I was not prepared for it—one likes a little preparation before marriage as well as before death. (*Aside.*)

COUNTESS. What! you are cast down—alarmed—want to recant—but I won't let you—You *shall* marry me—I insist upon it.

MARQUIS. What, directly?

COUNTESS. Yes, directly—I am in a hurry.

MARQUIS. I believe this is mere trifling—Swear you will marry me.

COUNTESS. I do swear.

MARQUIS. You are witness to the oath.

ANTONIO AND JEROME. We are witness.

Enter SERVANT with DONNA ISABELLA veiled.

SERVANT. A Lady, Madam, who says she is sister to the Marquis.

COUNTESS. Has the Marquis more sisters than one?

MARQUIS. No.

ANTONIO. Then this, I suppose, is your brother?

JEROME. Aye, in women's clothes—O dear, another fine sight!

COUNTESS. Oh Heavens, if it is a man, take him out of the room or I shall faint.

MARQUIS. Sister Isabella, when I shall relate to you the strange reception I have met with in this house, you will be amazed—but I think you will sincerely rejoice at the final event of my visit, when I tell you it is a solemn promise from this Lady to become my wife.

ISABEL. I give you joy most unfeignedly. (*Pulls off her veil.*)

COUNTESS. It is a *woman*.

ANTONIO. Aye, that it is—Madam, let me bid you welcome to the castle. (*Goes and salutes her.*)

COUNTESS. (*To the Marquis.*) Why, what are you—(*After trembling as if much terrified*) an't you a woman?

ISABEL. Countess, I knew you never would have consented to have seen the Marquis, had he been introduced into the house as a man, therefore I formed this stratagem, unknown to him, thus to bring you together.

MARQUIS. (*To the Countess.*) Do not droop, my dearest wife.

COUNTESS. And are you really the Marquis? What a strange blunder have I made!

MARQUIS. I am the Marquis—and it shall be my future care to banish for ever from your memory, the recollection of that marriage which has been the source of so much woe to you.

ANTONIO. Donna Isabella, we are all infinitely obliged to you for this stratagem, by which you have induced the Countess, innocently to break a vow, which she could not have kept without drawing upon herself both ridicule and melancholy—My dear Niece, depend upon it, there is but *one* vow a woman is authorized to take.

COUNTESS. And what vow is that *one* Uncle?

ANTONIO. A vow to LOVE, HONOUR and OBEY.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

THE END.

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

In a few instances, missing punctuation has been added and the occasional comma at the end of speech changed to a full stop.

The misspelling of the name Antonio as Antonis on the character's first entrance has been corrected. In the prologue, the spelling thee has been retained, since this is presumably part of the mimicry (the word is evidently "the" rather than "thee").

[End of The Widow's Vow by Elizabeth Inchbald]