



# *The Lost Duchess*

after John Webster's *"The White Devil"*

by Christian Lanciai

(2008, translated 2019)

*Dramatis personae :*

Lodovico  
Antonelli and  
Gasparo, his friends  
Duke Bracciano de Orsini  
his duchess Isabella, sister of  
Duke Francesco de' Medici of Florence  
Camillo Coromboni, married to  
Vittoria Corombona  
Flaminio, her brother, Orsini's secretary  
Marcello, her second brother, in the service of the Medici  
Zanche, her chamber maid, moor  
Cornelia, mother of Vittoria, Flaminio and Marcello  
Cardinal Monticelso, later pope, Camillo's relative  
Attorneys and judges  
The mistress at the home of convertites  
A servant with Francesco de' Medici  
Hortensio, a soldier  
Duke Giovanni, Orsini's son with Isabella  
Knights, guards, soldiers and attendants

The action takes place in Rome and Padua in the 1580s.

Vittoria Accoromboni, a historical person famous for her beauty, was only 28 when she was murdered together with her brother in 1585. Also the dukes Bracciano de Orsini, Francesco de' Medici and his sister Isabella with the pope Paul IV and Lodovico are historically correct except in timing, as the play has united several different chains of actions into one.

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*The Lost Duchess*

Act I scene 1.

*Lodovico* Exiled!

*Antonelli* Take it easy, Lodovico. It's only for your own best. Your way of life here in Rome has after all almost ruined you twice over.

*Lodovico* I was only obsessed with love. Is that a crime? Her beauty possessed me and brought out all my worst sides only to be overthrown and cast down to hell by that rake of a duke Orsini, who no one intends to take action against, although he has more stealthy murders on his conscience than I.

*Antonelli* Your misfortune is not that you love the same woman but that she is already married.

*Lodovico* With a fool of an impotent imbecile who can't love her, a humbug, a wooden clout, a zero with a minus!

*Gasparo* There, don't work yourself up, Lodovico. We only wish to cure you of your illness, which is a hopelessly impossible syndrome of love.

*Lodovico* Don't remind me! I'll withdraw and resign to hell! She could obtain my pardon directly with just a single little kiss on Orsini's dirt-impregnated sticky chin of bushes, but she will stick to her chaste husband of a fool!

*Antonelli* Yes, isn't it terrible? Let it work out with time, Lodovico, and we will do everything to extract your pardon.

*Lodovico* Thanks, my friends. I will have to content myself with that for the time being.

## Scene 2. Camillo's palace, almost like a court.

*Orsini (entering and kissing Vittoria's hand)* My very best wishes to the noblest of all nobles.

*Vittoria* And to my ducal friend my heartiest welcome greetings. I hope you shall feel at home here in Rome.

*Orsini* How could I feel otherwise in the city you live in?

*Vittoria* Thank you, your grace. *(leaves with Camillo)*

*Orsini* Flaminio!

*Flaminio* Yes, your grace?

*Orsini* Completely lost in your own ponderings? Have you forgotten that you are my only hope? Have you forgotten our sacred mission, the holiest of all, that we must never give up?

*Flaminio* Of course not, your grace. You know very well that no one can support your cause more than I do.

*Orsini* But it is getting worse every day! I will soon not be able to bear it any longer!

*Flaminio* Stay calm. I have arranged so that you can meet her.

*Orsini* At last a beginning, at last an opening in the storm clouds! Is there any hope then at last?

*Flaminio* Haven't you noticed how she encourages you? Are not her stealthy looks all too eloquent? Don't be fooled! A woman's coyness is just a mask for concealing her wildly raving desires. Never trust a woman's word, for they only hide the constantly hysterical inner reality of the most overwrought dreams and fantasies. But just because their sensitivity is so highly developed, they are too sharp for us, and they control us with a higher sense of manipulative art than any power could profess. They filter us as mosquitoes but only wish for elephants.

*Orsini* And her jealous husband?

*Flaminio* He is worthless. He is good for nothing, knows nothing, suspects nothing, sees nothing, wants nothing and does nothing. It was just a political marriage of convenience like all the others. They never slept with each other without something coming in between. Why do you think I would be interested in having my sister fall for someone better? Because she deserves someone better! No one can love

her more than her brother, no love can be higher than between brothers and sisters when it is sincere and pure, and anyone would have made her a better husband than the one she got. That's how it is. That's why I would do anything to help you on your truant way.

*Orsini* But what if she lets me down? What if she doesn't come to our appointed meeting?

*Flaminio* I could persuade her to anything. Her maid is on our side. Don't worry, your grace. Her heart is booked for yours. But mind you, here is that intolerable fool again.

*Camillo (enters again)*

*Flaminio* Hello there, brother! Where are you going? To your wife's bed?

*Camillo* Oh no, I will never reach that far, and you know it. No, I am going on some political errands to the north, so I will be away for some time.

*Flaminio* But surely you must have slept together? You are legally married in church, you know.

*Camillo* Yes, but to speak the truth, I don't even remember when we last slept together.

*Flaminio* How can you forget such a thing? Did you never take her virginity?

*Camillo* We never got that close. There always came something between.

*Flaminio* The ideal marriage! The wife totally chaste! And the husband completely without desire! What man could be better for a wife?

*Camillo* Yes, we are very happy.

*Flaminio* But are you absolutely certain of her virtue, being such a beauty as she is, being so popular in society, so that all men bring her their compliments, dare you leave her alone and go away?

*Camillo* Alas, what shall I do!

*Flaminio* Lock her up!

*Camillo* Splendid.

*Flaminio* Keep her away from all festivity and splendour.

*Camillo* That will be easy.

*Flaminio* Don't even let her go to church, but keep her on a leash, so that no one else could couple her.

*Camillo* Yes, her honour deserves it.

*Flaminio* Not until then could you be absolutely certain of never being made a cuckold. No, I am just joking. Here is some better advice. Give her absolutely free reins and all the freedom in the world. Women are more chaste and more gloriously chaste when they are allowed at large without restrictions. But lo, she comes. (*re-enter Vittoria*)

What possible cause for jealousy could you have with such a trustworthy wedded wife? Who could write sonnets to such eyes or compare her white smooth front with the snowclad slopes of the mountain Ida with its consummately intact beauty, or compare her hair with the bluishly black wings of the raven? Who could accept a challenge against such incomparability? Take it easy, Camillo. Everything will be arranged, and she as always will behave according to the best propriety. I will be certain to one day get both of you in bed with each other.

*Camillo* Thanks, Flaminio.

*Flaminio* Sister, (the duke is waiting for you in the banqueting hall,) your husband is not quite balanced.

*Vittoria* I haven't done anything to displease him. Have I disappointed him?

*Flaminio* Hasn't he always disappointed you with his perpetual unfaithfulness? What do you think he is up to during his constant excursions? Visiting monasteries?

*Vittoria* He has his political assignments which he always gives precedence to me.

*Flaminio* Orsini is always willing to give you precedence to his political assignments.

*Vittoria* Doesn't my husband suspect anything?

*Flaminio* He has gone away. I have convinced him of your perfect manners, and he thinks as highly of you as I. He trusts you as much as me.

*Vittoria* Let's see what this dashing duke Orsini is like and what he wants. Is he here?

*Flaminio* At your service, sister.

*Vittoria* Perhaps he could entertain me better than my husband, who just locks me up, forbids me to go to parties and even from going to church. He would prefer keeping me on a leash.

*Orsini* Orsini is not so dull.

*Vittoria* I can believe it. No one could be duller.

*(Flaminio opens a secret door, and Zanche enters with Orsini.)*

*Flaminio* Bravo, Zanche! You know what to do!

*(Zanche spreads out pretty carpets which she adorns with two cushions.)*

*Orsini* Now I wish time could halt forever, to give us all the opportunity we need to fill this interview, but alas, unfortunately and more often than not enjoyment and pleasure usually consume their own lifetime.

*(Cornelia watches them secretly without being seen.)*

Let your heart be as open as my own, and I promise you that we shall get along fine and not find anything to regret.

*Vittoria* Your grace, I can wish you naught else but all the best. *(Orsini embraces her passionately.)*

*Cornelia (unseen)* It is as I feared. My own son encourages and stages my daughter's adultery. This will bring about the downfall of our whole family.

*Vittoria* Let me entertain you with a parable, or more precisely a dream, which I had the other night. Perhaps you can interpret it. – I wandered lonely around midnight in a cemetery. There I sat in sadness leaned against a tree, when your duchess and my husband entered, she with a mattock and he with a spade. Without seeing me they started quarrelling and accusing me of intending to cut down the very beautiful tree, which I was lost in dreams under, to instead plant and cultivate thorns. For that reason they had arrived to bury me there alive. My husband started instantly digging a grave, and your consort, the noble duchess, helped him with her mattock, wreaked about skulls and other parts of skeletons in a kind of fury, and he was just as furious. And I sat still, invisible and so dejected, that I couldn't even give thought to a single prayer.

*Orsini* That was a nightmare. Forget it at once.

*Vittoria* But then to my surprise and salvation there was suddenly a whirlwind, which violently tore off a branch from my very tree, which fell down and killed them both, so that they disappeared in the very grave they had been digging.

*Flaminio* Thus my sister dreams and unconsciously plants in her lover a plan to kill both her husband and his wife. Ingenious!

*Orsini* My beloved, that dream I call an obvious revelation. Here in my heart you have the one who will always protect you against a jealous husband, against an evilly plotting duchess, against all supremacy and law and every kind of threat, for I shall raise you far above the law and carefully make sure that no one will be safe against all the evils of the world except you, insured like a bulwark by my protection, your only true friend, your lover and provider for the future as the father of your children.

*Cornelia (steps forth)* Thus speaks a traitor against his home, family and honour, a seducer with only deceitful words of emptiness, a corrupter who only thinks of himself!

*Flaminio* And where did you pop up from, dear mother? Zanche, leave the stage at once! (*Zanche leaves.*)

*Cornelia* What are you doing here, your grace? Never before has there been poison poured into my impeccable daughter's soul and heart by a base and insidious villain!

*Flaminio* Mother, for your own good, get back to where you came from!

*Vittoria* Mother, I beg you to first listen to me.

*Cornelia* Have I then only brought up snakes by my womb to my own perdition? Your children will only reward you with worries; anguish, sorrows and problems is their only gratitude for the dolour with which their parents brought them life, which they crying painfully will do their utmost to keep alive until they wasted are sent down into their graves before their time by the self-made self-destructive disasters of their children!

*Orsini* Who let that scarecrow in?

*Vittoria* I beg of you, your grace...

*Cornelia* What have you done to your duchess, your grace? Is she still alive? Perhaps she wouldn't be, if she hadn't in these very days arrived here in Rome.

*Flaminio* In Rome!

*Vittoria* The duchess!

*Orsini* She will never then know what's good for her.

*Cornelia* The recklessness of princes is like the unreliable caprices of clocks, ignoring completely if everything goes wrong if only they can keep going.

*Flaminio* Are you finished?

*Cornelia* Alas, my poor son-in-law!

*Vittoria* Mother, I must protest. My virtue and honour absolves me, since I have never fallen.

*Cornelia* I am just saying, that if you ever disgrace us, yourself and your mother's bed, then be your life as short and comfortless as the dry tears shed by great men at the obsequies of their victims!

*Orsini* You are mad, poor hag.

*Cornelia* Your treason against us, your grace, will but give you the shortest breath of life, envied by all and more pitied than anyone else after your consort's death. Your kiss on my daughter is the seal on the curse of your own blood!

*Vittoria* Woe betide me! I am lost! (*hurries out*)

*Flaminio* You went too far, your grace. Shall I bring her back in?

*Orsini* No, this is too much. I had better go to bed. My nerves are in rebellion. Send me to doctor Giulio. Relentless woman! For no reason at all you have let in the storm in our lives! If anything evil will come of this, yours is the entire blame!  
(storms out)

*Flaminio* Your nightly visit, mother, was not very convenient. You who represent honour are raising roaring dishonour from the abyss. And now the duke will have to travel home alone without an escort. My pay is small in his service, but that's all I have, since I hardly will get any inheritance.

*Cornelia* Is poverty then an excuse for base and insidious action and intrigue?

*Flaminio* Our father was a man of honour who left an inheritance and a fortune intact when he passed away, but we had nothing thereof. In Padua, where I was brought up and went to the university, I had to manage chiefly by mending my professor's socks. Shall I then all my life be directed only to your mercy and the barren honour of your non-existent tasteless mother's milk? No, I was never ashamed of anything and never will be, inspired enough by my own life's natural dynamics immune to all fear and all things evil by the lusty invigorating wine of life itself.

*Cornelia* If only I never had given birth to you!

*Flaminio* Yes, I would rather have been born by some more earthly and cheap courtesan in Rome. Nature endows courtesans with a most bizarre quality by not giving birth to many children while these children instead have the more numerous fathers: they never need to worry about their livelihood. Complain to the cardinal. He knows how to wrong his children but gives his mares good stallions.

*Cornelia* Your shamelessness knows no bounds! (leaves)

*Flaminio* That the duchess has arrived here is most unwelcome news. Now the hill to ascend will get higher, and our way there must wind in its serpentine with greater velocity. But whatever may come, we shall get through, and it's just for us to go on. (exit)

Act II scene 1. Francesco de' Medici's palace in Rome.

Francesco, Cardinal Monticelso, Marcello (brother of Flaminio och Vittoria),  
and the duchess Isabella de Orsini.

*Francesco* Have you not seen your husband since you came here?

*Isabella* No, certainly not.

*Francesco* He is then incorrigible. If I was the lord of Camillo's house I would not hesitate to burn it down, if only to burn all the squealing tomcats rambling around there hoping for an opportunity of fornication.

*Marcello* My lord, the duke is here.

*Francesco* Hide, Isabella! He doesn't deserve to see you yet.

*Isabella* Speak kindly with him, dear brother. Don't make things worse. I accept all the blame, and if there is any cure against the malady of his infidelity, let me be the administrator thereof in love to at last calm him down.

*Francesco* We shall chastise him well enough. Get out, sister! (*Isabella retires.*)

(enter Orsini with Flaminio)

*(cordially)* Welcome, dear brother-in-law! What can we do for you, whether in Florence or Rome?

*Monticelso* Before you introduce whatever you have to discuss, let me piously come between to anticipate and prevent any possible outbreak of passion.

*Orsini* Your eminence, please, we will be as quiet as in church.

*Monticelso* My best duke and friend, I must earnestly ask you to consider. Is it worth throwing away your spire, honour and responsibility to society for a vain urge that never can be satisfied? The drunkard will sober up at times and get dry, and when your indulgences once have passed, you will find yourself in the same vacuum of only remorse and dried out consumption. Is it worth it? I ask you to consider, that when nobility indulgently commits self-willed shipwreck, their honour, titles and fame will disappear without a trace with their bogged down and forgotten names.

*Orsini* Tell me when you are finished.

*Monticelso* As your friend I don't wish to flatter you but only to tell you the truth.

*Orsini (to Francesco)* And you, my friend, will perhaps better understand the falcon's urge for freedom and the necessity of roaming wildly and flying as hard and high as possible? And what is the falcon's hunt if he may not freely chase his prey?

*Francesco* There are birds of prey that should fly more for the sun but which prefer to glutton in easier preys to catch. These lazy birds are called vultures. Do you know Vittoria Corombona?

*Orsini* I can't deny it.

*Francesco* She has a noble husband who lacks means and fortune, and still he has kept her impeccable.

*Orsini* So what? My good cardinal, will you as her confessor maintain that you don't know what's driving her?

*Francesco* You try to make her a slut.

*Orsini* Your venom doesn't affect me. If she really were my mistress, no arsenal or bomb attacks of your poison batteries would touch her anyway.

*Francesco* Let's not make war. You have a wife, and she is my own sister. I wish death had taken her before you took her and another!

*Orsini* Do you wish your sister dead?

*Francesco* Because of you and your treatment of her. I am afraid that she herself wishes for the same thing.

*Orsini* You don't know what you are talking about.

*Francesco* I know it better than you. I know, that lust is double-edged, like a lovely seductive goddess of revenge, carrying her weapon behind her back, and striking when you least expect it and believe yourself most blessed and safe in the blind intoxication of your lust.

*Monticelso* Brothers, sons, friends, now you are at it anyway and in full array for quarrel. Mind you that your abyssal fireworks don't transcend into thunder and lightning.

*Orsini* I am not impressed by his fizzling bangers.

*Francesco* I have cannons. Just you wait.

*Orsini* They will only stifle you with powder in your eyes and smoke in your nose.

*Francesco* Just you wait until you explode, for I can aim with care.

*Orsini* Shoot then. Let's make an appointment. Any time and anywhere. I will gladly also expedite your seconds.

*Monticelso* Gentlemen, don't be childish! Not one more word, except in milder tones!

*Francesco* I don't object.

*Orsini* And do you think that you will triumph for baiting a lion?

*Monticelso* Gentlemen!

*Orsini* I am void, my cardinal, I can control myself.

*Francesco* We seek the duke for conference, but he is not at home. We appear in person, but he does not receive us, for he is busy. But one day we will come to terms, I promise you that.

*Monticelso* I ask you instead to devote yourself to vital matters. You do have interests in common also, you know. Lodovico, for example, has taken his exile for an excuse for piracy and has joined the pirates that you both are threatened by and fight.

*Francesco* You are right. Let's forget what we have against each other to instead concentrate on our common security. Marcello, call on Camillo. (*Marcello leaves.*)

*Orsini* You are right, my friend and brother.

(*enter Isabella*)

*Francesco* Here is your duchess. Speak kindly with her. We will leave you two together, for you haven't seen each other for very long. Come, gentlefolk, let's retreat in respect of marriage.

*Orsini* By your manoeuvres you have presented a surprising situation like by magic. (*All leave except Orsini and Isabella.*)

Are you well, my wife?

*Isabella* And more than well, to see yourself so well.

*Orsini* I wondered what whirlwind gave you such haste to Rome.

*Isabella* Affection. What else?

*Orsini* Affection? What suddenly gave it wings for such acceleration?

*Isabella* Maybe some feeling of guilt.

*Orsini* Guilt? For what?

*Isabella* You sleep better if you cleanse yourself at times by tearing yourself away and setting out to maybe unload your mind to some confessor.

*Orsini* Can't you do that at home?

*Isabella* My husband, we haven't seen each other for two months.

*Orsini* And why then must we see each other all of a sudden?

*Isabella* I was just interested in finding out if I still was married.

*Orsini* You were, until you arrived. Now when you are here, I will take the occasion to separate from you. I will not sleep with you any more.

*Isabella* Hard words! What did I do to displease you?

*Orsini* Nothing, if it weren't for your coming here.

*Isabella* I was hoping to be welcomed by the man I loved, the man I always offered my lips, and the man I willingly offered my virginity.

*Orsini* You talk too much. Obsequiousness had no effect on me. On the contrary, I find it revolting.

*Isabella* Is all that you can give me only tears then, for all that I gave you?

*Orsini* The tears are your own. I have nothing to do with them.

*Isabella* But you cause them!

*Orsini* Shut up! Lock yourself up in your room, if you can't offer anything better! *(re-enter Francesco and Monticelso)*

*Francesco* Tears? What is this, sister?

*Isabella* Nothing, my brother.

*Francesco (to Orsini)* What's wrong, my brother? She if anyone deserves a better welcome.

*Orsini* Welcome? What welcome has she offered me? Bitterness and jealousy and tears!

*Francesco* Collect yourself, my sister, and control yourself! You must know that men never can stand women crying to their faces, and least of all their married men.

*Isabella* My brother, it's over. I will not trouble him any more. I am hereby separated from him, and I shall never sleep with him any more.

*Francesco* What reasons do you have for this?

*Orsini* She is jealous because of Vittoria Corombona.

*Isabella* If only I was a man, I would joyfully tear out the eyes of that witch and scorpion, cut off the lips, ears and nose of that whore and pull out every tooth from the mouth of that strumpet and keep them as memories and trophies of my revenge! Compared to my sufferings, all hell is just rose water.

*Francesco* Now you are being foolish, my sister, and have fallen to the paranoia of your derailed imagination. You are not sane, if you thus have allowed yourself to become obsessed with such destructive thoughts. Take it easy, for God's sake! This grossly calumniated Vittoria has never done the least harm to any human being. Why then would you harm her?

*Orsini* She is just obsessed with her own sickly fantasies.

*Isabella* I will leave you in peace and go from here to Padua. Perhaps I shall never see you again, not anyone of you.

*Orsini* Let her have her way, so maybe she will calm down with time.

*Francesco* Perhaps she will repent. Soon she will come kneeling to our cardinal again and begging him of forgiveness or her all too hastily sworn statement.

*Isabella* Cruelty, do your best, and break my heart into so bitter pain, that it never will be able to speak again! *(retires)*

*(enter Marcello with Camillo)*

*Francesco* Splendid! Then we can at least go to war with the pirates! Did you get the commissions?

*Marcello* Here they all are.

*Francesco* Excellent! Let's have a conference then.

*(All leave except Orsini and Flaminio.)*

*Orsini* Well, my friend, what do you suggest?

*Flaminio* They will send him to Naples, but I can make it for him to Candia. *(Enter doctor Giulio.)* And here is another, who knows everything.

*Orsini* Doctor Giulio, upon my honour! Can you do anything about our situation and help us out of our dilemma?

*Giulio* There are no diseases that I cannot cure.

*Orsini* That's what I mean. If you are so sure of the cure, you must be equally sure of the opposite. I have a mission for you, an urgent and commendable errand in Padua.

*Giulio* I see. She is your illness, and you need to be cured.  
*Orsini* You couldn't make a more exact diagnosis. Then we have Camillo, my dear secretary. What medicine do you have for him?  
*Flaminio* He could happen to some accident by his own doing in his careless ways. Such things happen every night in Rome, where everything is possible.  
*Orsini* So we can trust you, doctor?  
*Giulio* My cures never failed.  
*Orsini* And Flaminio, I trust your art. Perform it well, but without exaggerations, – just natural and efficient.  
*Flaminio* I would never do anything unnatural.  
*Orsini* Then it's settled. (*leaves with them both, his arms around them.*)

## Scene 2.

*Monticelso* My dear nephew, here is a letter for you, anonymous, I am afraid.  
*Camillo* What does it say?  
*Monticelso* Perhaps you can guess the contents.  
*Camillo* I am used to such things. It's like an illness, and for each new dose of medicine, the temperature will rise.  
*Monticelso* Shall I read it?  
*Camillo* Please. It can't be worse than the previous ones.  
*Monticelso* (*reads*) "Your horns are now so many, that you have none left of your own."  
*Camillo* He suggests, that I have been deceived so much, that I have no manhood left.  
*Monticelso* You take it lightly.  
*Camillo* You get used to it.  
*Monticelso* And still you consider her honest, honourable and impeccable?  
*Camillo* More so than ever. She keeps all randy monsters at bay. She can manage.  
*Monticelso* So you are not worried about her even though you go away to war?  
*Camillo* I beg you, Cardinal, please keep her under watch, give her the protection of a guardian angel, and the mere pious consideration of her from my side and yours will keep her above all temptation.  
*Monticelso* And you have no children?  
*Camillo* Never had.  
*Monticelso* Then you are happy in spite of all.  
*Francesco* If she had children without impediment by providence, all nature, time and manhood would regret it.  
*Monticelso* Marcello is your commissioner. Turn the war to your advantage, and you will come home a hero to a wife welcoming you with pride.  
*Camillo* Yes, we'll see about that. Now I want to do the town and get drunk.  
*Francesco* Go, Marcello, with your commissioner and keep him out of the gutter.  
*Marcello* It's an honour for me to do battle by his side.  
*Camillo* Be especially on your guard during the nights, when the dangers are the most furtive and insidious.  
*Monticelso* We shall be well on our guard, my son.

*Camillo* Wouldn't it be wise to sell everything she owned, now that I am to be a soldier, and to detach myself from her for good?

*Monticelso* What would you then have to come back home to? Live to come home, and your high morals will bring you through all the battles.

*Camillo* You make it sound so easy. Come, Marcello! Hold me under my arms, for now we shall get drunk! (*out with Marcello*)

*Francesco* What will happen now when he is away? Will the duke Orsini now concentrate all his batteries on the conquest of the war widow?

*Monticelso* Be certain of that. Now he has his great chance to hasten to his self-promoted ruin. I happened to hear, by the way, that the pirate Lodovico now is in Padua.

*Francesco* Is it true?

*Monticelso* It certainly is. I had a letter from him and concerning him with supplications of his pressed pardon. He also appealed with your sister.

*Francesco* We don't need his exile. It was enough to mark and demonstrate a symbolic exile policy. It's more important for us to see Orsini make haste to his perdition.

*Monticelso* What does she say? Is she buying his music or making resistance?

*Francesco* That's the question. If he succeeds in pulling her down in his sick obsession, we can't do more than hope that they both get stuck and rot together.

### Scene 3. In prison

*Marcello* Alas, brother, tell me you were innocent of the crime!

*Flaminio* It was no crime, I have told you a thousand times, only an accident.

*Marcello* But you were with him! And you made me get away before it happened!

*Flaminio* So you have nothing to fear. They can't touch you even for having conspired.

*Marcello* Have *you* conspired?

*Flaminio* Only for the sake of our dearest sister. As you know, I never loved anyone but her, like you perhaps also did, and therefore my highest wish has always been to protect her, primarily against her husband, who now is dead, but also against the randy herd of strange clowns and idiots who were driven mad by her beauty to insatiable wild ideas.

*Marcello* Like your employer?

*Flaminio* Orsini loves her but has never touched her. That has been the case with most of them.

*Marcello* So you can swear on that you didn't cause Camillo's death by order of Orsini?

*Flaminio* I did explain it to you. We were both drunk. He then insisted on playing at leapfrog to prove that he was absolutely sober although he was more drunk and full than a bursting egg. He jumped, got across but failed to land properly, broke his neck and was dead instantly. It passed in a second. I could do nothing. He was stone dead when I reached him presently. Drunkenness has that effect, that it inspires to far greater audacity of enterprise than you would ever dare to embark on in sobriety.

*Marcello* I just wish I could believe you.  
*Flaminio* It was an accident, and we are both unaccountable. I am afraid that we have a greater reason for concern for our sister.  
*Marcello* Why?  
*Flaminio* I have heard, that the duke suddenly lost his beloved consort, the fair duchess Isabella, who appears to have been poisoned.  
*Marcello* But she had gone to Padua!  
*Flaminio* Yes, that's where she died.  
*Marcello* How could our sister be suspected of a crime in Padua, when she is in Rome?  
*Flaminio* She is suspected of intrigues, to like a witch have manipulated the duke to take the life of both Camillo and his duchess.  
*Marcello* But that is absurd!  
*Flaminio* Of course it is, but only we are aware of it. Heading an approaching trial for witchcraft is the cardinal himself.

#### Scene 4.

*Francesco* There is no evidence.  
*Monticelso* Is that required? We have two mysterious deaths at the same time, which both could have been murder, and the duke alone had obvious motives for both, even if he is cleared with both alibi and proven innocence. But we know for sure that the duchess was poisoned.  
*Francesco* How?  
*Monticelso* In the most insidious possible way. She owned a portrait of the duke which she cherished with all the warmth she couldn't feel for her promiscuous husband. Every evening she kissed the portrait in honest affection, like as wishing it goodnight, but the last night her lips were burning afterwards, and her last wish was that no one should touch the portrait. That's why they believe it was poisoned.  
*Francesco* Suspicion built on belief?  
*Monticelso* I am convinced that was the case.  
*Francesco* But Camillo died by accident. There could be no question of poison there.  
*Monticelso* Was it then really an accident?  
*Francesco* He was drunk when he insisted on playing at leapfrog.  
*Monticelso* And no witnesses? Only the inscrutable Flaminio in the vicinity, Flaminio, our duke's secretary and only implicitly trusted man?  
*Francesco* I admit it appears a bit murky, but you can't build a trial on only circumstantial evidence.  
*Monticelso* The duke is at large. There is no one you can suspect of having rubbed in poison on the duchess picture. Also you can't prosecute Flaminio for Camillo having had his neck broken, which was the only cause of death. But the motives are with the duke, and he had only one motive: Vittoria.  
*Francesco* Is she then to be blamed for the duke's desire?  
*Monticelso* She is the only cause. It doesn't have to be a murder trial. It's enough with just a regular investigation.

*Francesco* Like an inquisition?

*Monticelso* Two heinous crimes have been committed, and the cause is obvious. No one can be tried for both, but you can reach the cause. Is it then not our duty to do what we can, when there is a risk that two obvious murderers are allowed to slip away?

*Francesco* It's on your responsibility, cardinal. Our aim was to get at a clever duke's depravity and weakness to bring about his fall. We have utterly failed in that. Instead the aim is directed to impeach an innocent widow.

*Monticelso* I doubt her innocence. Only the duchess, who blamed herself, was completely innocent of her husband's lapse.

*Francesco* You will do as you wish. But I fear nothing good will come out of this.

*Monticelso* The tangle can't get any worse or more evil. All we can do is to stop it from getting worse.

*Francesco* Can we?

*Monticelso* It is our duty to do everything we can to try.

### Act III scene 1. The trial.

Enter Francesco with Monticelso and 6 judges, Vittoria, Flaminio and Marcello as the accused, an attorney, guards and the public. Orsini wants to join.

*Monticelso* Your grace, this is no place for you. His Holiness has set up this trial only for our private investigation.

*Orsini* I beg you, cardinal, – it will suit you perfectly. *(slips some fine clothing to him)*

*Monticelso (calling)* A chair for his grace!

*Orsini* Your kindness is too obliging – like a Dutchwoman in church I should have brought my own chair.

*Monticelso* As you please, your grace. *(keeps the present)* Your excellencies, please proceed with the sessions of today.

*Attorney* *Domine judex, converte oculos in bane pestem, mulierum corruptissimum.*

*Vittoria* What does he mean?

*Francesco* It's a lawyer speaking against you.

*Vittoria* Let him then speak intelligibly. Or else I will not answer.

*Francesco* But why? You understand Latin.

*Vittoria* I do, but the public present who came here to hear this case are at least half of them not educated in the language.

*Monticelso* Proceed with the trial.

*Vittoria* Begging your pardon, but I must insist that it be not obscured by an alien language of chancellery. All people here have the right to hear and understand what is going on.

*Francesco* Your eminence, I sustain, that she is not asking too much. I beg of you to change into the common language of us all.

*Monticelso* My God! My good Madame, it will not make your case any better but only more notorious.

*Attorney* It's your funeral!

*Vittoria* I am here for your target and will let you know indeed when you strike me.

*Attorney* Honourable notaries, judges and your eminence, let me then direct your attention to this completely corrupted and manipulative woman, who with such black art has succeeded in carrying through such an extensive manoeuvre of blatant crimes with such cleverness, that it was all calculated to be swept under the carpet and forgotten as unintelligible mysteries in unsurpassed insidiousness.

*Vittoria* What is this?

*Attorney* Keep your mouth shut. Such unheard of sins methodically practised here must be exposed.

*Vittoria* My lords, this attorney has swallowed placards of meaningless inane proclamations, which like word diarrhoeas of a politician don't mean anything. He doesn't know what he is talking about and has nothing substantial. If he first babbled Latin it's now balderdash.

*Francesco* Your honour, we who understand you applaud your rhetorical eloquence, but we all beg you to be more explicit.

*Monticelso* Let me then be more explicit and paint your actions in black and white more clearly than the false blush on your cheeks.

*Vittoria* You are mistaken. The blood you raise in me is as noble as your own mother's.

*Monticelso* I shall spare you, until our evidence makes clear the extent of your promiscuity. Let me direct your attention, gentlemen, to observe the remarkable degree of the advanced slyness of this woman.

*Vittoria* Your eminence, it is hardly proper for you to act in public as a prosecutor.

*Monticelso* Are you then instructing me?

*Vittoria* What else can I do, since you need instruction?

*Monticelso* You speak as befits your lost human nature. You behold, gentlemen, this outwardly so spotless nature, which like a forbidden fruit from Sodom and Gomorrah radiates fresh appetizingness, but which by a closer touch shall disintegrate in dust and dirt like a beautiful cover around nought but sin and shame and evil without limits.

*Vittoria* O holy mercy! You are all too seldom seen dressed up in rich attire!

*Monticelso* Perhaps when she all night long partied and received carriages outside in long rows of eagerly courting and voluptuous cavaliers, like a queen of her court, was still sacred as a publicly well known harlot?

*Vittoria* What is a harlot?

*Monticelso* Shall I explain to you what a harlot is, as if you did not know? Well, you have asked for it! Harlots are like sweets that make the teeth rot; they are like perfumes, which turn to poison in the nose; they are a seductive and stealthy alchemy, which by false illusions tempt to the wasting of lives; they are like shipwrecks but in beautiful weather. They are like the Russian winter, pure and white and sparkling but killing in horrific relentless cold, as if spring did not exist but it must remain eternally deep frozen, they are like the inexhaustible fuel consuming every soul in hell, they are the same toll of bells that first call you to your wedding and then to your funeral. The rich whores and courtesans are only maintained by blackmail and live like parasites and intestinal worms by the afflicted victim's sickly appetite, which constantly must swallow more to satiate the growth of

the parasites. What is a harlot? She is like a well forged bill of money which only brings perdition to everyone that touches it.

*Vittoria* You appear to have acquired a considerable insight in a practice demanding factual experience for its knowledge which I unfortunately lack.

*Monticelso* Shameless woman, collect all poisons from every lizard, worm and toad, and they shall then all be found in your stock!

*A judge* Can she then be condemned for her way of life?

*Another* The cardinal is aggressively exaggerating.

*Monticelso* You know all too well what promiscuity means. On adultery follows murder.

*Francesco* Your poor husband has been found dead.

*Vittoria* Oh, blessed he then, who has no more debts to regulate!

*Monticelso* He wanted to play at leapfrog and leaped straight into death. What wonder to have made such an unfortunate fall of only two meters to break his neck! And watch this creature, who was his wife! She does not appear dressed in mourning like a widow but instead fully equipped with spite and scorn, insults, impertinence and outrageous offence! Could you liken her comportment with any sincerity of grief?

*Vittoria* If I had known about his death I would indeed have adjusted myself and marked my sorrow more than well. Now it happens that in certain countries you dress all in white to mark your sorrow, so my dress was not entirely wrong.

*Monticelso* You are then too clever in masking and marking.

*Vittoria* And you, who withhold the news of his death just to the more easily be able to shock and target me in my embarrassment, to try to wound me and humiliate me the deeper for the pleasure of publicly stamping me with dishonour, do you then call my defence for my integrity and soul just indecent impertinence, facing an inhuman cardinal arrayed in purple splendour and for his impeccable cruelty dressed up in the false holiness of hypocrisy? Let me then appeal from this unchristian justice to a more human court with barbarians and savages!

*Monticelso* Observe, gentlemen, how she deliberately scandalizes our court proceedings!

*Vittoria* I humbly bend my neck down to the ground for you, gentlemen, as a wronged woman accused of who knows what if not only for being a woman, and have I then as a human being no right to defend myself? If you want to get at me at any price, then cut off my neck and have it done with, and we can then part as friends, for your way of dragging me to court just to undo me, I can't despise enough for its base cowardice and even less accept.

*Judge 2* She is brave.

*Monticelso* Such clever cheating and forged jewels could make you doubt the true ones.

*Vittoria* You deceive yourself, your eminence, for you are banging your heads of glass against my diamond integrity, which will undo the false stratagem of the evil and sick intentions of your masquerade. If you wish to frighten us with devils, threats and mischief, turn to children who are easier to scare out of their minds by the musty superstition of your covert cruelty! You spit against the wind with your

loose accusations of murder and promiscuity and seem not to have learned that it will all come back on yourself.

*Monticelso* I ask you, lady Vittoria, to only answer me on one question. Who was lodged with you on the night when your husband was killed?

*Orsini (rising)* That question demands an answer from me, for I was the one.

*Monticelso* Your business?

*Orsini* I was with her to comfort her and offer help, since her husband was in deep debt to you.

*Monticelso* So he was.

*Orsini* And it was feared that you for that very reason would take action against her.

*Monticelso* And who made you her informant and economic authority?

*Orsini* My charitableness, compassion and mercy, that should emanate from every generous and noble heart to orphans and widows.

*Monticelso* And your lust?

*Orsini* The greatest cowards among dogs bark the loudest. Do you hear me? The sword you are sharpening with the cruelty of your accomplished meanness I will myself bury deep in your bowels! You try to establish your sick fantasies as a reality and in its disclosure drag down an impeccable woman in the filthy stinking bog of your paranoia! You are all lies. That's all you are capable of, and you try to establish your lies by the false ostentatious disguise of your mendacious position. I can't stand the fanatically sick masquerade of this abominable inquisition! *(rises to leave)*

*A servant* Your grace, your mantle. *(wants to return the fine clothing)*

*Orsini* It was for the cardinal as a compensation for his giving me a place here. I don't accept given gifts in return. If he doesn't want to use it himself, let him give it to his mule. *(leaves)*

*Monticelso* Your defendant has left.

*Vittoria* So that the wolves better can gorge on their prey.

*Francesco* Your eminence, there is without doubt reasons for suspicions of murder, but there is a complete absence of evidence as to who did it and why. I can't believe that she possesses a soul so black that she alone would have planned, instigated and run the whole thing. If she has, it must with time carry bitter fruits for herself to harvest, but let then time punish her rather than that we do wrong in believing more in our prejudices, following them and judging from them with perhaps unfair exaggerations for a questionable result, which then with time might risk to fall back upon ourselves. Let's stick to the point and only decide whether she committed adultery or not.

*Vittoria* I see clearly enough the poison you conceal under the sugar pill cover.

*Monticelso* Now when the duke has left us, I can safely present a few letters by the duke with shameless propositions of a common bath with a banquet following just to enhance the lust.

*Vittoria* You may have obtained his letters expressing an unquestionable desire, but there is no answer from me. Is that my crime, that I answered his letters with coldness?

*Monticelso* Coldness, in the middle of summer, in its hottest days?

*Vittoria* So your intention is to judge me and condemn me for the duke having offered me his love. It's like judging and condemning a crystal clear beautiful river for a confused man having drowned himself in it.

*Monticelso* He is drowned indeed, the way in which he lost his way in love.

*Vittoria* I ask you to sum up all my palpable wrongs, and you will find, that all I made myself guilty of was a preference for good food and beautiful clothes, good company and happy festivities. You can't incriminate me for anything else. You might as well cultivate a sport of shooting flies with pistols.

*Monticelso* Only the devil himself could be as cunning as she is disguised in this white purity in such a masterful display of superficial deceit.

*Francesco* Who gave you the letter?

*Vittoria* I am not obliged to tell you.

*Monticelso* Your duke gave you on the twelfth of August a thousand gold ducates.

*Vittoria* That was to release your cousin from prison. They were needed for your family, and I paid.

*Monticelso* I rather believe it was a wage for his lust.

*Vittoria* Who believes it except you? Who claims it except you? Whatever you allege, it can't touch me, since it has nothing to do with me.

*Monticelso* It was my cousin Camillo's misfortune to be married to you. We thought the best of you, since you were of a good family related with the Vitellis, but it was an expensive match. He bought you for twelve thousand ducats and had no dowry, and you proved strangely expensive for being so light of virtue. You arrived here with an established reputation as a notorious courtesan, and you have only confirmed it.

*Vittoria* You are just repeating the same tune over and over again, the same emptiness, getting nowhere and have not produced a trace of evidence to support any of the gross and absurd far-fetched accusations with which you attempted to massacre my integrity. You have nothing to show except empty vicious exaggerations, produced only as an attempt at a base defamation of character.

*Monticelso* Brothers of the accused, Marcello and Flaminio, we have no case against you, so you are free to go, but we must ask you to keep yourselves available for further questioning in our investigation.

*Francesco* I always had good faith in my Marcello, and I vouch for him.

*Flaminio* My lord the duke of Orsini vouches for me.

*Monticelso* Concerning you yourself, Vittoria Corombona, your public behaviour in this issue must cost you all sympathy and compassion. By your promiscuity you have so corrupted your life and reputation that you could never be restored to purity except by being locked up in a convent. That will be your judgement. You will be sentenced to the prison for converts.

*Vittoria* Prison for converts? What is that?

*Monticelso* An asylum for penitent prostitutes.

*Vittoria* Is that then the final solution for the consumed and unwanted wives of Roman nobles?

*Francesco* Please have patience.

*Vittoria* First I must have revenge. – Your own salvation is then already booked and paid and insured, since you dare to act as you do?

*Monticelso* I have heard enough! Remove the infamous woman!  
*Vittoria* This is worse than a ravishment.  
*Monticelso* How so?  
*Vittoria* You have raped justice herself and forced her to your pleasure.  
*Monticelso* You are mad and talk rubbish.  
*Vittoria* I deplore you, for you will fade out and stifle in the overwhelming corruption and rot of your own sins.  
*Monticelso* She is possessed.  
*Vittoria* I can't punish you for everything, as you have punished me for nothing, but my words will grow the deeper into you to never leave you in peace. What was that place in which you sentenced me to be locked up?  
*Monticelso* An asylum for converts.  
*Vittoria* I will transform it into a more holy, virtuous and decent place than the richest and most sumptuous of papal palaces, and there I shall plant and spread peace which never more will be found in your heart. Diamonds give the greatest warmth, shine the brightest, and become hardest and most invaluable in the depths of the coldest and deepest darkness. (*She is brought out by guards. The court is dismissed.*)  
*Orsini (reappearing)* Now we can be friends again, Francesco. Give me your hand for our friendship in the grave, a suitable place for atonement and cure against all hatred.  
*Francesco* What on earth do you mean?  
*Orsini* I will not chase more blood from that white cheek which you just made to bleed to death. Farewell, my friend. (*leaves*)  
*Francesco* These words are too remarkable to bode anything good. Even less I can understand what he really means.  
*Flaminio (aside)* I understand it too well. He has received the details of the death of his duchess and will now go on from there but bides his time and hides the direction of his thoughts well. Instead of pretending any grief for the death of his duchess, I shall exaggerate and dramatize despair over my sister's fate, and it will cancel all further questions. The tongue of treason has a bolting pace of insidiousness in me. I shall openly talk with anyone but not listen to anyone and to all appearances behave like an idiot at least politically.

## Scene 2.

*Monticelso* My friend, don't cry yourself to death. She is dead.  
*Francesco* They are both dead.  
*Monticelso* But your wife died naturally. Your sister's case is worse, who was murdered.  
*Francesco* It was never established how. You sent Corombona innocent to a penitentiary for a murder she never could have committed.  
*Monticelso* You know the chain of circumstantial evidence. She was the spider in the plot, led the blind Orsini to the precipice of the criminal conspiracy, who leased his killers, professional villains who by cunning never fear to get caught, like

Corombona's brother and pimp, who self-evidently took the life of my cousin Camillo so cleverly that it neither was noticed, traced or left any witnesses, while the duke's wife's, your sister's death is even more suspicious but without doubt well planned. Will you not seek revenge?

*Francesco* Don't wake up such demons of paranoid thoughts to a hopelessly painful life in me. The vendetta is the most vicious of circles which relentlessly and constantly will end up hitting everyone who took part in it. It kills all and for no good. I don't want any part in the most morbid of all forms of madness.

*Monticelso* Let it sink in. Surely you must understand that the duke alone was behind both the death of my cousin and Isabella. The problem is that no justice can reach him. All we could do was to place Corombona out of his reach.

*Francesco* Leave me alone! I don't want to listen to your speculations!

*Monticelso* The pope has passed away and left a conclusive pardon of that villain and pirate Lodovico, who has a pension here in Padua from Isabella. He could be a perfect instrument for your interests.

*Francesco* Alas, you only worsen my despair and worries! Go to your cardinals and your deceased pope! You should all now be commonly interested in intriguing and manipulating, since you all have interests in the papal stool!

*Monticelso* I shall leave you in peace. *(leaves)*

*Francesco (alone, thoughtful, sits down to write a letter)* Corombona! My Vittoria! Loved by all, attained by no one and not even your husband, who died for his faithfulness to you, who had a thousand other lovers, of which no one could even make you totter! And how could I then as a fresh widower fail to see my chance? Your beauty is your only truthful testimony; such a beauty cannot hide or harbour any guilt. *(rings a bell when he has finished writing. Enter a servant.)*

Deliver this letter personally to the asylum of converts, more specifically to Vittoria Corombona or the mistress of that institution. Hurry!

*Servant* Yes. *(goes off)*

*Francesco* My love is now posted. Whatever it may lead to is without any significance, if only it may live. And it will give me the most perfect reason for reaching a settlement with the duke of Orsini, my rival and sister's murderer!

#### Act IV scene 1. The asylum for converts.

*Mistress* If it became known that the duke is in contact with her it would provide me with a problem. Flirts and furtive messages is not routine in this place. You see, this establishment is supposed to be descent in contrast to most other places.

*Flaminio* Don't worry. All that people care about today is the recently deceased pope. Nothing else is of interest to anyone, and for the rest, the lady you are guarding is forgotten by all her other wooers just because she is now more captive than captivating.

*(enter Francesco's servant)*

*Servant* There is Flaminio himself in conversation with the mistress. – It is you I am looking for, mistress. I carry a letter to be delivered to Vittoria Corombona.

*Mistress* That shall be, my young friend. Here I am always made to run with messages, and I do it decently and efficiently.

*Servant* With all the discretion and secrecy demanded by the cause. You shall know me, for there will be more. Thanks for your silence and understanding. (*leaves*)

*Flaminio* A letter? From whom?

*Mistress* The sender is anonymous. They always are. They only want to be read, never heard or seen.

*Flaminio* For my sister?

*Mistress* Yes. Most letters here are anonymous and for her.

*Flaminio* Then I will take it to her.

*Mistress* You are her brother and not even anonymous. Then I can trust you. (*leaves*)

*Flaminio* How is this? Someone else writing letters to her than my duke? And stealthily with underground secrecy? This smells of fresh intrigue. (*hesitating as to what to do with the letter*)

*Orsini* (*enters*) What do you have there, Flaminio?

*Flaminio* Look for yourself!

*Orsini* A letter! For her! And from whom?

*Flaminio* At least not from you.

*Orsini* I can see that, you fool! That's why it's interesting. Who is it from?

*Flaminio* From anyone. How could I guess what bird is in the pie before the pie has been cut up?

*Orsini* Then I will open it, even if it might contain her own heart. (*tears it from him and opens it eagerly*) Who is the signature? Florence! Who is Florence?

*Flaminio* As I said, it could be anyone.

*Orsini* Read it to me! You are her brother and responsible for whatever might happen to her.

*Flaminio* With your authority and permission then, your grace, and by your express command: (*reads*)

"My love, let me convert your tears to triumphs, I, who obviously is the only one still standing when all your other persecutors and parasites have let you down. I shall work night and day to have your unjust, scandalous and regrettable exile and confinement changed into your freedom to accompany me to a better life in Florence, where my love's concern shall grant every wish from your side even if they were as many as the silver hairs on my head." (*interrupts*) So he is old, rather harmless and debile, probably. (*continues*) "But what does age matter when love is concerned, which only can be rejuvenated by its mere existence, since it is the most divine thing of all, and gods never age, neither do princes." He is an atheist. This will not do. There are too many of that sort. Let's tear the letter asunder.

*Orsini* This drives me mad. We don't know who he is, but she is in contact with him no less than with me! This is not acceptable! What sort of a man is he?

*Flaminio* The same sort as you: immersed and drowning in love. You are not alone about your love even in this asylum for the rehabilitation of love.

*Orsini* I thought my tortures of love were over and that I at last here could manage her alone, and still all the randy brothel customers keep pursuing her even in here! Is she then what she is branded to be? A man consumer of unheard of

proportions? Do I then have to murder her just to have peace in my grave with her without her other wooers and pimps? Take me to her immediately, you your sister's only pimp!

*Flaminio* You are irate and not in a presentable condition. Calm down. Not even you may hurt her.

*Orsini* Do you then dare to risk making my temper worse?

*Flaminio* As my lord you were always about as gentle as Polypheme towards Ulysses, with the generous privilege that he would be the last one to be eaten alive. You would then gladly dig up my grave just to feed your parrots with its grass. That would be like music to you.

*Orsini* Don't be silly now. She is mine and belongs to no one else, and no one else may write letters to her.

*Flaminio* He has already done so.

*Orsini* She has not received it.

*Flaminio* Will she not receive it?

*Orsini* Not without our knowledge who the villain is.

*Flaminio* We are all villains to her.

*Orsini* But I am the first one! Get in!

## Scene 2. Vittoria's chamber.

*Orsini (enters with Flaminio, less willingly)* What is this my lady? Can you read? (*shows her the letter demonstratively*)

*Vittoria* Why this wrath? Here you break in by force although it's almost like a nunnery.

*Orsini* Have I not the right? Am I not the one who loves you? Haven't I loved you enough and done everything for you? Who is then this extra lover?

*Vittoria* My lord, I don't understand...

*Orsini* Show me the other letters!

*Vittoria* What other letters?

*Orsini* You must have thousands! Where is your archive? How many lovers are you communicating with in secret besides me? Can then not even a convert menagerie for old hags and burnt out whores keep out your wooers and pimps and all your debauchery?

*Vittoria* My lord, you go way over the top in the fury of the hasty conclusions of your prejudice. As the signature of a kind letter wishing me well stands a simple 'Florence'. It could only be the duke of Florence himself, Francesco Medici. He has never written to me before, spoken any word of kindness to me and never made advances. He only surprises me.

*Orsini* A new intrigue! And behind my back! So even he has fallen to your beauty, this beauty that has seduced all Rome by its attraction and placed you in the middle stage of the theatre of scandals! I can't bear it! How many wooers and lovers and victims will you have?

*Flaminio* Take it easy, your grace.

*Orsini* Alas, for my duchess, whom I sacrificed for you! How I miss her now! She at least was faithful to me! But your beauty led me astray, I was captured by your spell and allowed myself to be bewitched by the charm of your magic to enter the ruthlessness and senselessness of a criminal course only to finally have it proved, that the very beauty, that you fall for and love beyond reason, is the last thing you can trust!

*Vittoria* And who are you to put the blame of the death of your duchess on me, because you evidently took your wife's life out of mad desire of another's wife? Am I responsible for that? The death of your duchess is only on the account of your conscience. I didn't know about it, and if I even had had the slightest inkling about that you planned such a cruelty, I would from the start have excluded you from my acquaintance. You can't blame me for the twisted exaggerations of your life driving you into a monster. The seed was in you, so you were a monster even before. I have no part in that. Get out of my life! I bitterly regret that I ever even got into contact with you!

*Flaminio* He only meant well but only did wrong.

*Vittoria* How can you accuse me for your sins and your misfortune? What have you caused more than my dishonour and tragedy? You have defiled my house and scared all my friends away from there, and what place did you give me instead? Do you call this asylum a decent palace for me to receive you in? Are you satisfied with having me contained here? For no one else brought me here but your infamous intrigues. Maybe I was not the first one. Boast then about how many victims you consumed by transforming them to locked up so called penitent and repentant whores, lost, rejected, consumed, exiled and scrapped to this abyssal bottom of society! I have been crying all nights and days here, but I will never more shed any tear for you. I would rather break entirely and immediately find my last desperate refuge in my grave! (*throws herself on her bed*)

*Orsini (touched)* My love! Don't cry any more! Why are you crying? How can I assist you and help you?

*Vittoria* I am only crying daggers into my heart. I have torn you out. Go!

*Flaminio* He is repentant, my sister. Spare him for his folly and mistakes, for he is only a child.

*Vittoria* Are you my brother, you pimp? Who gave him to me but you? Because you are my brother you are then a worse scoundrel than he.

*Orsini* Pardon my jealousy, Vittoria, which ran away with me.

*Vittoria* And beyond all control and reach. What do you ask of me? To be your strumpet for real? To be seriously stained and marked as a whore by all Rome? Will you then take everything away from me, as if you didn't do it already?

*Flaminio* Sister, I am entirely for you and on your side. – Your grace, you have only caused her harm. Don't make it worse by insisting. She is only a sensitive woman, and you will never anyway be able to inflict on her virtue. – My sister, I will always, as I always did, defend you and protect you. – Do you really think, my duke of Bracciano, that that duke of Florence could give her any love?

*Orsini* Shall then these eyes, that for so long enjoyed your sight, now be put out just because they loved you?

*Flaminio* Give her your tenderness, your grace. That will always work with women.

*Orsini* Forget my jealousy and love, but please keep my friendship, my love. Here is my hand.

*Vittoria* Get out!

*Orsini* What the duke of Florence promised and suggested I shall fulfil. We will get you out of this place to a higher elevation than you ever dared to dream about. Let me conclude this promise with a holy kiss as an unbreakable seal. (*kisses her*)

*Flaminio* And now is the right moment, while pope is fresh as a corpse and the holy vanity of the whole world only thinks of taking over his pretentious hypocrisy. Rome is at a loss, and everyone is only watching the conclave. Let's smuggle her out dressed as a page to safety in Padua.

*Orsini* We must also have your brother Marcello with us, who has served the Medici, and your aged mother. Then we can start a new life, especially for our Vittoria, my love, who should prepare to become a duchess.

*Vittoria* You brought me here. Get me out of here, and then we'll see what tomorrow brings. Take nothing for granted. I am not yours, for you can never have my soul, which is the last thing I have left to live for.

*Orsini* That's reasonable, and I buy it. Now let's get going in taking you out, so that our future may begin.

### Scene 3. The Vatican.

*Francesco* I trust you keep careful watch of the conclave?

*Lodovico* Everything is under strictest control. Nothing can be smuggled in or out, the only thing that goes in is food for the cardinals, which is carefully examined: It is not only tested by eating, but it is searched, in case it would occur that messages were smuggled in the food.

*Francesco* If I know the vibes of the conclave right, there will be a papal election without problems.

*Lodovico* There is no one obvious, though.

*Francesco* No, there was never anyone obvious ever. Still I think I know the general inclination.

*A cardinal (opens a window announcing:)* *Habemus papam! Lorenzo di Monticelso electus est in sedem apostolicam, et elegit sibi nomen Paulum Quartum.*

*Lodovico* Monticelso!

*Francesco* I felt it.

*Servant (enters)* Your grace, Vittoria...

*Francesco* Well, what about Vittoria?

*Servant* She has escaped from the asylum of the converts.

*Francesco* You don't say? And she escaped just like that? Wasn't she carefully locked up and guarded? Who helped her?

*Servant* The duke Orsini.

*Francesco* Ha! You don't say!

*Lodovico* You don't seem very much surprised.

*Francesco* It was unavoidable. *(to the servant)* Let the mistress of that establishment immediately be arrested for neglect. She loses her position and will be locked up as a ward herself. *(the servant leaves)*

*(aside)* How splendidly all my plans work out! The right candidate is elected pope, Monticelso is in my hands, and my letter to the slut Corombona was efficient – the duke Orsini walked into the trap, that idiot, taking my letter for an instruction manual, which was my intention. Now he will blindly follow the road direction to perdition and marry, and if his reputation wasn't ruined already, with a fallen woman, a condemned whore, so humiliated with her disgrace stamped on her front so as to be practically branded. It couldn't be better. *(enter Monticelso)* Congratulations to your election, your holiness.

*Monticelso* It was due to your preparations. The cardinals were already persuaded and not only by money. But I heard something about a coup taking place at the same time. Vittoria Corombona appears to have been abducted.

*Francesco* And it must be obvious by whom.

*Monticelso* Orsini of course. His stupidity never ceases to surprise me, since he so consistently excels his own mistakes.

*Francesco* You are the pope now. So it should be convenient to take appropriate measures?

*Monticelso* Absolutely. It's about time that the duke is excommunicated with his victim, the strumpet Corombona, and with them their families and households, of course. You don't enter sacred penitentiaries for former prostitutes to abduct converts just like that.

*Francesco* That's what I mean.

*Monticelso* The excommunication will be implemented immediately. *(exit)*

*Lodovico* Pardon me, your grace, but it surprises me a little that you are so vehemently engaged in this.

*Francesco* The duchess Isabella was my sister. Her son is with his father. Is it then surprising that I am engaged, if I also know that my sister was poisoned?

*Lodovico* Hardly.

*Francesco* Join us or go against us, but choose the right side. Remember, that the pope always wins.

*Lodovico* You don't have to persuade me. I loved my duchess Isabella, who in Padua arranged my exile to be recalled. I saw her die, I know myself how she was poisoned, and I swore revenge.

*Francesco* Excellent. Then we know where we stand and can safely rely on you. All I want is really to have my nephew back alive. Whoever dies or changes side or is sacrificed in that process does not concern me at all. *(leaves)*

*Lodovico* The old pope recalled my exile. May I therefore gratefully serve the papal seat even if the new pope is a corrupt villain.

Act V scene 1. The palace of the duke Orsini.

*Flaminio* So my fortune is made. My sister is ensured as consort of the duke I serve, thereby she has retrieved her good reputation and social standing and also wealth and a home. Our mother couldn't be more gratified, and in view of the happy end, everyone will gladly forget all the crooked ways that led us here. Mind you, here comes the duke himself with his illustrious duchess.

*Orsini* My dearest friend, my ambition for you is to remedy all your pains for nothing. I wanted nothing of the outrageous inquisition intrigues of Medici and Monticelso, they organised them alone just to get at you and failed completely with all their wicked schemes. You are now instead elevated as my duchess, and I hope indeed our worst ordeals thereby will be over.

*Vittoria* I hope so too, but you never can be sure. Monticelso is now pope and has excommunicated us, and I fear that the Florentine duke is still on his side.

*Orsini* At worst there will be a war between us, but I am used to more serious crises. – My Flaminio and brother-in-law, what kind of Hungarians have entered my service? They seem a bit exotic for my taste.

*Flaminio* I don't know more about them than that they distinguished themselves as knights of St. John and fought the Turks with bravery and success at Lepanto, Malta, Rhodes, Cyprus and Ragusa. They have been Capuchins but preferred to instead spite the enemies of Christianity with the sword.

*Orsini* One of them is a moor. What is he doing here?

*Flaminio* He is the most experienced of them all and has joined your service in the belief that he could be useful in your approaching conflict with Florence.

*Orsini* Let me see him.

*Flaminio* Here he is in person. His name is Mulinassar.

*Mulinassar* At your service, your grace.

*Orsini* It is not common that moors enter the service of Christian lords, who most of all fight moors, but when a moor is sincerely serious in serving us, he is more often than not better than any Christian officer.

*Mulinassar* It is my ambition to be of that very kind of service.

*Orsini* You are welcome together with these Hungarian Maltese knights of St. John. Come, Flaminio. Your sister must be celebrated with banquets every day.

*(exeunt all except Mulinassar)*

*Mulinassar* So far I have succeeded well with my fake performance, this double role play, which only appears more convincing to the audience and the thoughtless multitude the more deceptive it is. Well, it's just to carry on. Here are my brave companions.

*(enter Carlo and Pedro)*

There you are, my Hungarians. So far no one suspected anything.

*Carlo (Lodovico in disguise)* What is your strategy, your grace?

*Mulinassar (Francesco in disguise)* First of all to gather knowledge and information of the duke Orsini's plans. Perhaps we don't have to go to war, but if it becomes necessary it must be brief and efficient. Flaminio, Orsini's secretary, is in love with Zanche, the duke's chamber maid, whom I have secured as my personal spy. That way we can learn about everything.

*Lodovico* Zanche, the moor?

*Francesco* She does not suspect that I myself am no moor. What is then more natural than that she, a moorish slave, confides in another intrepid moor? The secrets of Vittoria, the duke, Flaminio and the entire court is like an open book to her.

*Gasparo (Pedro in disguise)* Then that duke may hardly live very long.

*Francesco* We shall see. One step at a time. Play your parts well and convincing as Hungarians and knights of St. John, and we will get at that duke at last with his entire menagerie. Here is Flaminio again, that pimp. He must also perish. Leave me until further, and then we shall see what we can do to our cause. (*Lodovico and Gasparo leave.*) One word, signor Flaminio.

*Flaminio* What do you want from me, moor?

*Francesco* Just a small piece of news, that perhaps the duke should be told for a warning.

*Flaminio* Let's hear it.

*Francesco* Zanche, the duke's chamber maid, is a moor like me, so we are almost like brother and sister. She has told me strange stories.

*Francesco* How else would the duke of Florence know that you hired knights of St. John as your spies and special mercenaries?

*Flaminio* How do you, a moor, know that he knows?

*Francesco* Look for yourself. Here is a letter by the duke of Florence to your brother, which his friend Zanche managed to trace in his pocket when he was sleeping with her one night. (*produces a letter*)

*Flaminio (reads)* This is infamous! "My good helper Marcello, thanks for the information that the duke has employed knights of St. John, which is in direct conflict with the papal decree of the duke's excommunication, wherefore I will immediately notify the pope." This is too infamous! My brother a traitor to his own, to his sister! He has no right to live! What rich bribery has then Medici oiled him with to turn him a traitor to his family and benefactor?

*Francesco* I just thought your duke should be notified.

*Flaminio* Thanks, my noble moor. I can forgive him everything but having taken Zanche before me! Your fidelity and loyalty will be highly recommended. Go! I will take care of it myself!

*Francesco (aside)* The poison is planted, and in the dynamic administration of a Flaminio, its effects should be at least explosive. (*leaves*)

*Flaminio* My brother! Traitor even to Vittoria! After all we have gone through! These papal and Florentine bribes could then even corrupt the noblest of hearts, as if their corruption of the entire world wasn't enough! My brother, you are doomed, and a process like this is so painful that it must be cut as short as possible not to grow worse and infect the entire family of the duke, my sister's heart and our poor mother's breast, already more than enough tortured almost to death! (*leaves*)

Scene 2.

*Orsini* My whole court is poisoned. We have spies here, and we don't know from where they come or who they are. The paranoia is spreading, and all suspect each other.

*Vittoria* It is always like that in wartime. No one is normal, and everyone forgets to be human.

*Orsini* Marcello, you who served the duke of Florence, have you any idea of what is going on?

*Marcello* Unfortunately I know nothing, your grace. I wish I knew. Even my brother has looked at me askance.

*Orsini* It's only because you are courting the same woman, that Zanche, the moor, who everyone is charmed by while no one knows what she really is up to.

*Vittoria* She always served me implicitly. I could always trust her more than well.

*Orsini* She and the moor Mulinassar have sometimes been seen whispering with each other, as if they had secrets together. (*enter Flaminio*)

*Marcello* I am sure she is as innocent as I.

*Flaminio* (*can't control himself*) You are then all too sure, brother, of all kinds of things and especially of getting away! (*pierces him*)

*Vittoria* No!

*Cornelia* My son! My fallen, terrible, disgraceful, incorrigible, hopeless son! What have you done!

*Marcello* My brother, I forgive you, for you didn't know what you were doing.

*Orsini* What is this? Why?

*Flaminio* He knows it all too well.

*Marcello* What do I know, brother, except that I always loved you?

*Flaminio* He has betrayed us all to that duke of Medici he never ceased to take bribes from! I have evidence! Our enemy knows everything about us and our allies! I have a letter from the duke to this lousy spy who didn't hesitate to betray his entire family! (*shows the open letter*)

*Marcello* (*dying*) I never received that letter.

*Flaminio* No, for Zanche stole it from you as a payment for your taking her virginity!

*Orsini* Is it true?

*Vittoria* I know my brothers. Marcello was always innocent and often innocently punished, and Flaminio was always impulsive and went too far.

*Flaminio* I am sorry, my brother, but this treason has almost destroyed us to the last man. I only wished to spare you by making your process as short as possible.

*Marcello* I forgive you. (*dies in Flaminio's arms*)

*Cornelia* But I don't. A fratricide, Flaminio, is always unforgivable as a fratricide, and I fear all this to be even a terrible misunderstanding.

*Orsini* That spies are around and treason taking place is sure, but it's not certain that it has been stopped. (*feels his throat*)

*Vittoria* What is it?

*Orsini* I can't breathe. My throat is burning. Water, quickly!

*Flaminio* He is poisoned! Doctor! Quick, at once!

*Vittoria* Here, my friend, drink water. (*gives him water to drink. He immediately coughs it up. Enter doctor, examines quickly.*)

*Flaminio* What is it?

*Doctor* Poisoning.

*Flaminio* Mortal?

*Doctor* I am afraid so.

*Flaminio* Treason! No one leaves the palace!

*Orsini* I am dying, Flaminio. I feel it. It's my own fault. Forgive me, my dearest Vittoria. I only wanted to love you and never do you the least harm.

*Vittoria* But who has poisoned you?

*Orsini* I don't know. Not you, not Flaminio, and least of all Marcello. That's all I know for sure.

*Flaminio* We are in a bad state when we don't know who is betraying and poisoning us.

*Orsini* I am sorry, my love. We men are villains all, murderers, damned egoists, ruthless reckless emperors and wretched tyrants, while you alone, my love, was pure and white and free from every possible shadow of human baseness. (*dies*)

*Vittoria* Not again! To be widow once again, after my second husband has been murdered like the first, is more than I can bear, since my first widowhood already was the end of me. (*cries over Orsini, whom she embraces*)

*Zanche* He murdered his first wife for your sake, my lady.

*Vittoria* What does it matter? How does it help? How do you know? What do you know?

*Zanche* He paid a doctor to smear a picture which his duchess kissed every evening since it was of him. Now he has been poisoned himself, as he didn't just poison his first wife.

*Vittoria* Still it was murder and no revenge!

*Flaminio* That is not quite certain. There were several who swore to avenge the duchess Isabella, the exiled Lodovico for one.

*Vittoria* He is not here.

*Flaminio* How can you be so sure? Here are hundreds of soldiers, mercenaries, strangers and adventurers, and all are masked in the false and absurd armours of the cursed war. Couldn't then one of them be Lodovico, who never was reported to have left Padua?

*Vittoria* You make me uncertain.

*Flaminio* So we all are more than ever, for death is breathing down our necks.

### Scene 3.

*Lodovico* I beg of you, your grace, let's abandon our ridiculous conceited adventure and masquerade and return to order and be honest and normal. The duke is dead, so we have no issue with him any more, and his death was shameful and has cost Marcello his life and his mother her already faltering mind.

*Francesco* My nephew remains and will now inherit his father's titles, and his stepmother still entices me to wish to see how this drama will continue.

*Lodovico* Forget Vittoria Corombona, your grace. No one can reach her. Two men married her and had both of them to pay for it with their lives, and I think none of them ever reached any satisfaction. I have done my part and had my revenge for the duchess Isabella. That is enough for me.

*Francesco* I will remain with my men. You do as you please, but if you will no longer take any part, then leave this stage and its remaining issues with us. (*leaves*)

*Lodovico* He is still forging evil schemes and remains possessed by Corombona. Nothing good could come out of this play with death. I had better warn someone with a sense of responsibility before worse things happen. (*leaves*)

*Hortensio* Those two are working on intrigues, as they keep stealing around whispering in stealth and secrecy. They had better be more closely observed in these days of an increasing epidemic of murders. I will turn to the young duke Giovanni. (*leaves*)

#### Scene 4. Marcello's vigil

*Cornelia* Murdered by the hand of a brother! And still I can't condemn him, for he was no less a son of mine than Marcello, the youngest and most honest, pious, noble and sincere.

*Vittoria* Mother, don't grieve yourself to death. You have two children left, and one of them is me, your own daughter.

*Cornelia* You demand the impossible of me, for if one child dies, the others will soon follow, especially if this was a victim to a subversive court intrigue.

*Zanche* Vittoria is right. Crying is always a waste, for no one will thank you for your tears, and you can't even have them back – only more sorrows, for that flood of tears will only grow the more it cries and will never end but as an inundation, in which you drown yourself in misery.

*Flaminio* What kind of a mourning camp is this of only deplorable wailings from cats?

*Vittoria* Spare us, Flaminio. We are grieving.

*Flaminio* Our treason? It is a fact. The duke is dead, poisoned, and we don't know who did it, and the murderer is still at large. The moor Mulinassar has disappeared without a trace, and it is feared that he has changed sides to Florence. We are closed up in the prison of our own unknown tragedy, like the fly which can't understand from where the spider's web suddenly appeared in which he is caught, and we have only more murders to expect, as our lives have been betrayed for nothing by unknown insidious envy. I therefore suggest the following. (*produces two pistols*) My duke left me nothing for my long faithful service. Are you prepared and willing as his widow, sister, to give me at least some share of my just wages?

*Vittoria* Your only reward can but be that of Cain, for this crime alone obscures all your controversial services. You never did anything good, Flaminio.

*Flaminio* What about your marriage with your duke, that finally made you a duchess with great riches?

*Vittoria* I would rather still be married with my poor Camillo than that he was murdered for the sake of a randy self-indulgent hopelessly undisciplined and reckless duke.

*Flaminio* That fool! That goat! That idiot! That if anything you should be grateful to me for, that you got out of his life's straitjacket and nothingness.

*Vittoria* So it was you who took the life of my husband?

*Flaminio* He was drunk and had a bad fall when he insisted on playing at leapfrog. To break his neck when he was lying there like a trampled worm on the floor was a pure act of mercy.

*Vittoria* I knew it! First my husband, and then our brother! Who is next?

*Flaminio* I suggest all three of us, for we have nothing to live for. You had no children, the new duke your stepson has nothing to offer us, I am excluded from his court as no longer required, he even intends to send you to some convent where you may not even bring Zanche with you, and I would gladly follow the duke, the only one who to some degree gave me some life.

*Vittoria* As a procurer, conspirer and pimp for your sister. We never had the like of such a scabrous career in our family.

*Flaminio* It made you a duchess.

*Vittoria* At the cost of a brother and two husbands. There is nothing in the world that can excuse or make it worth while to murder innocence.

*Flaminio* I can't defend myself, for what is done is done. Marcello was a traitor...

*Vittoria* His death indicates the contrary, as he was not allowed to speak for his defence. Do you in your customary reckless impulsiveness intend to shoot us and then yourself?

*Flaminio* You were the only ones I loved. (*gives over his pistols*) Shoot me first, and then do what you like with your lives, if you wish to live. I have nothing to live for. You have condemned me, sister, as a fratricide, and your judgement is fair, whatever Marcello was up to. I also nourished some love for Zanche, but she betrayed me and gave my secrets to the moor who has now escaped to Florence, possibly an agent to Medici and the leader of the conspiracy.

*Lodovico (has entered)* Wrong. He was himself the duke of Florence.

*Flaminio* Entered by stealth in disguise? That was bold! Was it he himself who poisoned our duke?

*Lodovico* No, it was I.

*Flaminio* By what right? Who are you, Hungarian agent and false knight of St. John?

*Lodovico (casts off his disguise. Gasparo, who has followed him in, does the same.)* The avenger of my duchess Isabella, with every right!

*Flaminio* Prince Lodovico! And Gasparo! So that was the plot! Both smuggled in as agents of Medici, who without doubt have continued to deliver instructions! Close all doors! The traitors are here! By the authority of the duchess, you are now under arrest!

*Lodovico* We don't give in. For me there was only one duchess, and in her place I find only a mob of cheats, upstarts and gender opportunists! Get at them! They are only parasites!

*(Vittoria takes one of his brother's guns and tries to shoot, which comes to nothing. Gasparo cuts her with his sword, and Lodovico kills Flaminio with his.)*

*Flaminio (dying)* Idiots! They weren't loaded! Forgive me, sister, that I subjected you to one last trial. I was curious to find out if you really would be capable of giving your brother the death and execution he deserved. Now you don't have to.

*Vittoria* In all my life you knew me so little! I would never have been able to aim any weapon against any brother I had left, if even he was the worst.

*Flaminio* All my concern was to protect you and further you.

*Vittoria* It's over now. Better luck next time. *(dies)*

*(Soldiers break in led by Giovanni and Hortensio.)*

*Hortensio* Treason! I knew it! Here they are!

*Giovanni* What is this? The duchess butchered! And Flaminio!

*Flaminio* I die for those I loved and served until they did not want me any more. *(dies)*

*Giovanni* Arrest these murderers at once! But it is prince Lodovico, the right hand of the duke of Florence!

*Lodovico* Your grace, I plead guilty of the unfortunate consummation of my revenge. No one was more innocent than Vittoria Corombona, who has been killed here by mistake, since we had no idea that their pistols were unloaded.

*Giovanni* You appear to have much to tell.

*Zanche* What he can't tell I may fill in, for I alone was Vittoria Corombona's friend of intimacy and was present from the beginning.

*Giovanni* Everything has gone too far. A web of passionate intrigue has twisted all minds to end up in a most unnecessary tragedy and disaster. Take care of the bodies, and bring down the prisoners!

*Lodovico* As a servant of the duke of Medici, your own uncle, I ask for the privilege of a relative.

*Giovanni* You have nothing to expect except a just punishment as the murderer of two members of my family. Vittoria Corombona was my stepmother and perhaps more sacred and virtuous than my mother, perhaps too virtuous and too beautiful for her own good. My lady, *(observes Cornelia, who has sunk down devastated,)* what has happened here can never be repaired, but I promise you this, that you will never again be exposed to new trials.

*Cornelia* I have lost three children, and they were not even given time to have children of their own. What can you do about that, and what is there for me to do but to die?

*Giovanni* Take care of her, and take care of the bodies. One funeral became three, but never will obsequies in Padua have been performed with greater dignity and honour. *(takes care of Cornelia. The bodies and the arrested are taken care of. Curtain.)*

*Tingmosgang, 24.8.2008,  
translation completed January 22nd 2019.*

