

THE MARRIAGES

GODFREY & ADELA

(Godfrey Chart's study, night. Piles of books surround GODFREY as he reads at his desk. Sighing, he puts down his book and stares into space. There is a

knock on the door. ADELA, Godfrey's sister, bursts onstage)

Adela

He's going to marry her! Papa's going to marry Mrs. Churchley!

GODFREY

The one from Colonel Parson's ball last Christmas?

ADELA

From Mrs. Parson's funeral this Easter.

GODFREY

An ominous start, I'd say...though he has perked up since her visit. What makes you think he'd marry...?

ADELA

I saw with my own eyes tonight ð he's in love with her.

GODFREY

For heaven's sake, Adela, don't jump to....

ADELA

He'll arrange it...he will, he will, he will! (dropping into an armchair) He oughtn't...he mustn't!

GODFREY

Nothing much we can....

ADELA

Godfrey, think of Momma...barely a year in her grave.

GODFREY

More like a year and a half. But yes, he should think of her.

ADELA

And to choose...that woman...after dear, sweet Momma. Think of what she was, Godfrey, and what she did for him. Has he no sympathy for what she went through?

GODFREY

I suppose he's not all that happy.

ADELA

Of course not...any more than you or I...or our dear little sisters. And it's dreadful of him to want to be.

GODFREY

Don't make yourself miserable till you're sure.

ADELA

Godfrey, if you had been at Mrs. Churchley's...if you had seen how they behaved after dinner & all that billing and cooing out in the open.

GODFREY

In front of everyone?

ADELA

In front of me! (imitating Mrs. Churchley) "Where has everyone gone, Major Chart? It's too early to go...it's too absurd." (imitating her father) Lots of things tonight, I suspect. (imitating Mrs. Churchley) "And where are you going?" (imitating her father) "Oh, I don't do that sort of thing these days.... But surely you must be going somewhere. You're not in sorrow." (imitating Mrs. Churchley) "I'll give up everything...for you. Do stay a little."

GODFREY

That must have made him squirm.

ADELA

He looked at me, at which point I busied myself with her paintings. (imitating Mrs. Churchley) "Tell me, Major Chart, what do you make of this annexation business...all that Brooklyn ruffraff joining us?" (imitating her father) "Oh, I don't know. It will help industry, I suppose...one big city." (imitating Mrs. Churchley) "Then we must put up with them."

GODFREY

Bravo, Adela! You're outdoing yourself.

ADELA

(imitating Mrs. Churchley)

It's more comfortable on the sofa, Major. Come sit closer ☺ I won't bite. There, that's better.... Oh, Major Chart.... Really, Major.... Oh, I don't do that sort of thing." (in her own voice) God only knows what they were doing.

GODFREY

You were in the room all that time?

ADELA

I left when she practically sat in his lap. I was never so embarrassed in my life. Thank God for her goldfish! (imitating her father) "See here, Adela, we must release this dear lady?" (in her own voice) As though it were my fault they were carrying on so.

BALTRAFFIO

MARK & BEATRICE

MARK

Life is too short for art. In haste we shape our bowl. It must be firm and bright...firm and bright! The devilish thing tends to become bright but hardly firm. When I rap it with my knuckles, it's not the right ring. There are flabby spots here and there where for the life of me I could not find the right word.

BEATRICE

(to RALPH)

Ha! That should be his worst sin.

MARK

(to RALPH)

Sin? It's the worst offence I know. It ought to...it absolutely should - I'm serious - be a capital offence. If I knew I would be hanged for it, I should manage to find the right word. The people who couldn't - some of them don't know it when they see it - should shut their inkstands so we're not deluged with their rubbish.

BEATRICE

And who is to save us from his rubbish?

MARK

Her greatest fear is that Dolcino should read Beltraffio...not that she has the slightest idea what it's about.

BEATRICE

I know enough about it to make me hope ☺- perhaps unrealistically ☺-

that Dolcino never be corrupted by it. I would do anything in my power to prevent it!

MARK

When he's old enough, he should read it...when he's twenty. Before that, it would be a waste...he wouldn't understand it. When he's of age, I'd like him to read all my works.

BEATRICE

And meanwhile, does he plan to lock them up in a drawer?

MARK

The child must be told that they are not for small boys. If he is properly brought up, he won't touch them.

RALPH

Actually, Mark's new book is all about raising children.

MARK

I want them to experience everything...make youthful mistakes, if need be...live life to the fullest.... And when they grow up....

BEATRICE

...experiment in love...like he does with his strumpets?

MARK

Ah, she couldn't resist that.... Well, my dear, the children in this book are a bit too young....

RALPH

You know, Dolcino would really enjoy it...at least the story element. He'll identify with the young prince.

MARK

As a matter of fact, I was planning to....

BEATRICE

(to MARK)

Don't you dare show it to him...I'm warning you!

MARK

She wouldn't like that, you see. And why shouldn't I read it to him, my pet. It's not as though you've kept your promise...filling him up with your religious poppycock!

BEATRICE

You'll regret it! Till the day you die, you'll regret it!

RALPH

Really, the two of you are working yourselves up over nothing. You're two passionate people, representing two different, though reconcilable, schools of thought.

BEATRICE

Reconcilable?... Ha! The Christian school and the pagan!

MARK

I would say it's choosing whether to make the most of life or the least.

BEATRICE

And I would say it's about gaining a better life in a better time and place.

MARK

In this so-called "better time and place," will it be a sin to make the most of that life too? And shall there be a bribe in that future state to delay one's pleasures further?... Perhaps I care too much for beauty...I delight in it. I adore it. I think of it continually. I strive to produce it, to reproduce it.

BEATRICE

His own son, whom he claims to love, doomed to eternal damnation, yet he prattles on about beauty

RALPH & GWENDELON

RALPH

Of course, the doctor should see him. But surely there was no need to frighten Mark half to death.

GWENDELON

No need? Doesn't it strike you as peculiar to read an author she can't abide at a time like this?

RALPH

What strikes me as peculiar is that priest coming.

GWENDELON

Would you rather cook baptize the child?

RALPH

She had him baptized? Here...under Mark Ambient's roof?

GWENDELON

Before...before it's too late.... Oh, my poor child, my sweet little Dolcino!

RALPH

Now don't get hysterical.

GWENDELON

I know Beatrice! She has her own way of judging. She'd go to any length to protect the child.

(beat)!

She never gave it!

RALPH

What?

GWENDELON

She never gave the medicine!

RALPH

That's absurd! She'd never do anything to....

GWENDELON

Trust me.... I know Beatrice!

(beat)

That manuscript! How she got hold of Mark's manuscript God only knows.

RALPH

Why, I gave it to her.

GWENDELON

You?... Why in Heaven's name would you give it to her?

RALPH

I thought...she might become reconciled to....

GWENDELON

What possessed you?

RALPH

What possessed me?

GWENDELON

You interfered.

RALPH

You're blaming me?

GWENDELON

You broke the balance. The book tipped the scales.

RALPH

I only meant to.... My God!

GWENDELON

It filled her with horror. And she was determined to sacrifice him to gain his salvation.

RALPH

Oh, I don't believe this. You make it sound like a Greek tragedy...like Iphigenia or...or....

RALPH & BEATRICE

BEATRICE

Here, let me help you.

RALPH

I hope this isn't a bad omen.

BEATRICE

So this is what all the fuss is about? (handing him several pages) I'm so sorry you've been drawn into our domestic situation.

RALPH No need to be sorry.

BEATRICE But I just don't know where to turn. "Alas! Alas! What shall I do? For my heart is sinking. Ye females, when I behold the cheerful look of my children, I have no power." (in tears) I'm at my wit's end. I feel utterly desperate!

RALPH

I wish I could help you both. (beat) You know I really think you should read his book. I'm sure you'd agree it's a rational approach to child-rearing.

BEATRICE

I know all about his rational approach.

RALPH

Why not take a look before you judge?

BEATRICE

I won't have Mark's ideas for Dolcino! I would do anything I could to prevent his becoming like Mark. I'd take him off to Australia, only I know Mark would stop at nothing to get him back.... And his books...they're everywhere. If only there were some far-distant planet...I would take him there in a chariot of fire.

RALPH

Better to enjoy your delightful son here on Earth.

BEATRICE

I love him more than life itself. (beat) Is it really so simple...Mark's book? Could Dolcino read it?

RALPH

It begins like a children's fable.... Here, why don't you take it?

BEATRICE

Well, I suppose I should, if there is a danger of his reading it.

RALPH

That would be awfully difficult to prevent.

BEATRICE

Perhaps impossible.... But you were reading it.

RALPH

No, no. It's yours. Plenty of other things here to read.

(handing her the manuscript)

At least it can do no harm. And it could be the instrument of your conversion.

BEATRICE

It's not I who needs conversion.

RALPH

I meant to this whole new way of thinking.

BEATRICE

Whatever the consequences, it's in God's hands now. (She exits. RALPH starts reading a book. Offstage, a door opens)

RALPH

She's put him to bed, Mark.

MARK & RALPH

MARK AMBIENT and RALPH O'NEILL enter, holding drinks. They seat themselves on the porch)

MARK (O.S.)

Far better to decide the world's fate outdoors on such a lovely day.

Ralph

So, am I correct, sir, that you do believe in art for art's sake?

Mark

I'd prefer to say that truth has it's purest expression in beauty.

RALPH

That's rather a nice way of putting it.... What a delightful spot for writing! I think I might discover a few truths while I'm here.

MARK

Let me give you one piece of advice. If you are going into this sort of thing...if you do intend to make a career of writing, there is something you should know beforehand & it may save you some disappointment.... There's a strong hatred of art out there.

RALPH

Oh, I'm aware of it, sir. We have quite a bit of that sort of thing in America. But I would scarcely expect to find such passions in this splendid setting.

MARK

Beatrice, we're home.... My wife must be somewhere about. Probably in Dolcino's room...that's our son...he's seven.... You're not married, Ralph?

RALPH

No though I hope to be some day. I'm a firm believer in marriage...a quiet home...lots of children.

MARK

Don't have a lot of children if you want a quiet home.

RALPH

Still, there's nothing like family life to complete a writer's experience...provide support. Or is my bourgeois past showing?

MARK

Well, my young friend, one must find out that sort of thing for oneself.... Should you like a refill, Ralph?

RALPH

No thanks, I'm fine.... You know, Mr. Ambient....

MARK

Mark.

RALPH

You know...Mark...I've read BELTRAFFIO FIVE TIMES already. Even TOOK MY COPY ALL 962 PAGES TO FLORENCE.

MARK

Ah, Firenze.

RALPH

I'd return to the pensione dead tired after a day with the Michael angelos...have supper, then take out BELTRAFFIO. There are passages I even know by heart.

MARK

Do you? Well, I'm most flattered.

(beat)

Ah, there she is in the garden, and she's got the boy.... He's always in his mother's pocket. (They go out on the lawn)

RALPH

It's magnificent...the garden!

MARK

Ah, you like it.
