

THE PLOTTERS AGAINST LOVE

A Classical Comedy

(and a classic case of liking what you get)

David S. Cole
1963-64

Characters

RONALD

ELYSSE

DEMETRIUS

LUCINDA, his wife

SIRWITH*

Two Dancers

The play is in nine scenes.

*pronounced "Seer - ith"

Scene I

(Scene: a cobbled street in front of two houses. Stage-right, the front facade of ELYSSE's corner house, facing out, but slanted slightly toward up-center. A dark brown door is set in the ground-floor level of this facade; on the second floor, a set of closed, curtained French windows open onto a balcony with an iron-work railing.

Stage-left, the front facade of LUCINDA's and DEMETRIUS' corner house, symmetrical in position with the facade on the other side of the stage. In the ground floor of this facade are set, in an arch the same shape as the French windows of ELYSSE's house, two large doors; the second floor has two very small, dark, square windows.

Going back from the onstage edge of each facade toward a common vanishing point (imagined as somewhere beyond up-center) is a row of facades of other houses. The farther upstage the facade of a particular house, the more sketchy the outline of its doors and windows.

Between these two rows of facades (i.e. perpendicular to the street which runs across the stage) runs another cobbled street ending abruptly up-center in a red brick wall which seems to seal it off.

The various facades should give an impression of stucco. The architecture - and the characters' costumes - are simplified, vague, halfhearted approximations of some eighteenth century style or other.

At rise, RONALD is pacing nervously before ELYSSE's house, casting frequent anxious glances at the balcony. He appears to be several times on the verge of calling up, but each time is embarrassed by the amused smile of DEMETRIUS, who, leaning in a relaxed way against the corner of his own house, is vainly trying to conceal his amusement. Finally, DEMETRIUS attempts to relieve the situation:)

DEMETRIUS

Would it be any easier if I took myself off?

RONALD

Oh, now please, Demetrius, I don't want you to think that!

DEMETRIUS

I mean, if it would be any easier...

RONALD

Not in the least, Demetrius; please don't think so. Didn't I ask you to come?

DEMETRIUS

Well, yes, you did.

RONALD

Yes, I did. I presented myself at your home and I said, "Demetrius, you are a courtly man and what I need is a courtly man," and would you please come? And you said, yes, you would.

DEMETRIUS

I did say so. But what's this about being such a courtly man, though? It's true, I work at the palace -

RONALD

A Trumpeter of the Guard!

DEMETRIUS

Yes, but you know, really, analyzing it, what is there in that? All I really ever do is make a noise when something's gone wrong.

RONALD

You are the only really courtly person I ever knew.

DEMETRIUS

Ah, but -

RONALD

No, you are. And while it's not very modest of you to force me to examples, there certainly is no want of them. Right away one thinks of your lady, your great evenings with champagne and violins, those celebrated costume balls. But I know what you could say about all that, and it's true. But I wonder how you would get out of the praise due your kindness to the old one, the player in this alley, the way every time he flings his instrument down, you run after and get it for him.

DEMETRIUS

It's not his fault if he's too mad to know he'll be needing it again. If that's your idea of courtly...

RONALD

It certainly is! Idea and ideal. Pattern. And if things hadn't gone so much against my family -

DEMETRIUS

I still can't get it through my head what you want me for.

RONALD

To have a really close look at what I'm doing, and then advise me, as I'm sure you'll know how to do.

DEMETRIUS

Well, but Ronald, my dear good man, when you have got me here, you don't seem to function at all. There,

(gesture towards ELYSSE's balcony)

you tell me, stands the woman you love, and here you stand, and what's happening?

RONALD

Now that raises a point. You'll agree courtship ought to make a man feel one if anything should; but you know what in actual fact I do feel like? Circus animals.

DEMETRIUS

Why that?

RONALD

Performing for you here.

DMETRIUS

You asked me to come...

RONALD

So I'll just have to get used to it, won't I?

(a sudden thought)

I haven't been offending you?

DEMETRIUS

No.

RONALD

No, that's good, because I certainly am going to need your help; to be told why it is I can't seem to hit the good nature in Elysse. I must not be expressing myself so well.

DEMETRIUS

That only?

RONALD

So if you could notice what I say, then suggest what I could say -.

DEMETRIUS

Yes, Ronald, but the thing is -

RONALD

- out of the depths of your courtliness.

(abruptly)

Your wife isn't going to come careening in here, is she?

DEMETRIUS

Oh, she won't be back in a hurry. We're having a little thing about the furniture just now, a little arrangement thing, and she's gone to the shops... Anyhow, never mind her. Let's hear you say your piece, and I'll be watching the window for an opening.

RONALD

Just begin?

DEMETRIUS

What were you thinking to do first?

RONALD

Not so much a question of "first"...

DEMETRIUS

Just begin.

RONALD

(whirling elaborately toward the balcony)

"Begin!" comes the cry from the heart, and joining in the heart's cry, the impulse from each sense and member is, "Begin!" To such clamor of the being, what should I make reply, where seek relief, how not begin? And yet, where begin? Suppose I ask, "Are you there, dear heart?" Useless! There or no, nothing like a reply's coming. Shut window and empty loggia - and to what end? No end. Not liked, not loved, not - I am even ready to believe - not even understood. Therefore does my wit inquire of my heart: Friend, what do we here? And the poor wit should, like his master, cry answerless, but that passion answers herself.

DEMETRIUS

What's supposed to be the upshot of all that?

RONALD

That's right, Demetrius, say it, come right out and say it, you'll be doing me a favor. If I'm not being courtly enough -

DEMETRIUS

My god, it's courtly enough, but where does it get you?

RONALD

Ah, even to that burthen have I just this while -

DEMETRIUS

Yes, I know, I know, I was there; but I mean, where is it supposed to get you?

(RONALD looks puzzled.)

What are you after?

RONALD

Love from my lady!

DEMETRIUS

Oh, Ronald, you have such a general mind! "Love from my lady!"
Yes, all right, love from your lady; but in particular?

(RONALD indicates complete failure to comprehend what DEMETRIUS is talking about.)

What are you in hopes to get here you don't think you could get elsewhere - a thoroughfare, Leone's palace, the slopes of Green Mountain? What brings you to the window?

RONALD

You mean, what will I ask for?

DEMETRIUS

And why haven't you been asking for it? You express yourself right and left, but not being answered shouldn't upset you. What have you said that needs answering?

RONALD

I was being courtly, you see, with a little prologue. I say a lot more.

DEMETRIUS

Well, Ronald, as it was specifically to prop your courtliness you asked me here, I know you won't take it the wrong way, my

saying that courtly is pointed.

RONALD

Thank you, Demetrius; I appreciate that advice, and here I go:

(whirls elaborately back to the window)

Beloved, consider with me that symbolical flower, the rose. Of what excellence in life has this flower not at some time given the image? Courage, youth, hope, vigor and joy; trinity, constancy and love - these meanings and more flit in among her petals and stare out from the living heart. Now therefore, when I come to ask a flower or her who is all things, what flower should I ask but that which is of all things symbol. Heart of my heart: the rose!

(holds up his hands to receive the thrown-down rose. Expectant pause. Nothing happens.)

DEMETRIUS

Before going on to a more elaborate explanation, are you sure she's there?

RONALD

Oh, she's there. Don't ask me how I know, but I know. It's an understanding between us, she's always to be there. Don't ask me when that understanding was reached, but she's there.

DEMETRIUS

Maybe she hasn't got a rose.

RONALD

Oh, it's a perfect green-house up there. One night, I asked for a rose, the way you've seen, and she sent down a potted hydrangia. That gave me something to think about.

DEMETRIUS

Still, what's in a rose? I'd try asking for something else.

RONALD

Would that be the courtly thing to do?

DEMETRIUS

It'd make sense.

RONALD

Now if I seem to be stressing this courtly thing too much --

DEMETRIUS

I know: you have your reasons. Now ask for something else.

(RONALD approaches the window again.)

RONALD

The rose was the wrong boon. What's a rose to her whose every word is a rose of eloquence, every glance a rose of fire, every breath rose-scented. It is my shame to have suggested so poor a favor. Roses away, roses from the mind, and down with roses! But toss me over the gay bit of silk you have always about you, that scarf. A rose of your chamber has the advantage of your presence, but clothing off your person has done what my wishes would do: lain trusted upon your members, shared life with you, gone with you before the world. The scarf, then, becomes a cipher of my inmost wishes; and what happiness that you should give me back any part of those deep desires. Heart of my heart: the scarf!

(holds up his hands to receive the thrown-down scarf. Expectant pause. Nothing happens.)

DEMETRIUS

She doesn't seem all that receptive tonight.

RONALD

Never. Nothing.

DEMETRIUS

Or maybe she's rummaging through a drawer.

RONALD

Have you ever seen her that she wasn't wearing it?

DEMETRIUS

One's expected to have noticed?

RONALD

What else is there to notice?

DEMETRIUS

Still, try something else.

RONALD

You wouldn't believe the fondness I have for that scarf.

DEMETRIUS

It'd be courtly to try for something else.

RONALD

Ah! At that word, objections vanish.

DEMETRIUS

As long as they vanish at something.

RONALD

Only, what am I going to ask for now?

DEMETRIUS

You mean you're out of things already?

RONALD

More or less.

DEMETRIUS

Is this how you act every night - drop by for a rag or a flower

and then go off bewailing what a poor scorned lover you are?

RONALD

But always I want, not the thing, this or that, but the thing as revealing a cast of mind...

DEMETRIUS

Ah, well, if it's her mind you want, you'd better direct the conversation in the direction of a note.

RONALD

Speech! Why not that benefit? Why speak in shadows, when -

(As he talks, DEMETRIUS swivels him around, so that without interrupting himself, or even particularly noticing, he is again addressing the balcony.)

there are words to speak. Not that I call for the music of your lips - a prophanation here in the streets. But if words were scratched upon a scroll - O ardent script of the reticent mind, careful running of a lady's thought! - and that scroll set to fluttering:

Then lovers might converse as lovers ought,
Where weighty words bear down the spindling thought.

Of this dialogue - soul with soul - speak now the first.
Heart of my heart: the note!

(Holds up his hands to receive the thrown-down note. Expectant pause. Nothing happens. He turns in great agitation to DEMETRIUS.)

This is how it is, every night. Words, signs, -nothing; - maybe a little mockery. I can't stand being this unhappy!

DEMETRIUS

Maybe she's looking for a pencil.

RONALD

Oh, it's a perfect stationer's up there - shelves of pencils and pads.

DEMETRIUS

You want me to believe you're unsuccessful, when you've been to the bedroom?

RONALD

Haven't been there . . .

DEMETRIUS

Those descriptions?

RONALD

Passion, Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS

Passion what?

RONALD

Paints the scene. Come, verdict: where have I been going wrong? Can you say, Demetrius, now you've seen?

DEMETRIUS

I've never heard a mistress talked about so well - or talked to so badly.

RONALD

I know I'm not all that impressive, but can you be more precise, any? I mean, what, is it my periods or diction? Something about the timbres of my voice, maybe?

DEMETRIUS

(doubtfully)

Not so much any of those, as wanting in -

(idea)

Could I show you?

RONALD

Show me?

DEMETRIUS

I mean, have a turn at the window myself, speaking as if it were me speaking.

RONALD

But it will be you; that is, it'll be some other voice, and she'll know; or if she doesn't know, she'll end by wanting you, or at least not wanting me; and she'll think -

DEMETRIUS

You know, you're going to be amazed how much further from the point all that is than you think. This is how I can serve you best. Shall I?

RONALD

(a moment of hesitation; then:)

There can be no dishonor or ineptitude in so courtly a spirit. You go ahead.

(DEMETRIUS ambles over to the balcony. He speaks the following confidentially and insinuatingly up to ELYSSE, almost as if he had a previous understanding with her. When he begins to speak in this tone, RONALD turns in surprise to see if he is not addressing somebody right next to him.)

DEMETRIUS

The farmyard is running under the moon; if dark boughs snap, it is tigers snapping them; fish whiten their element, and flowers are admitting the air. Flowers weakening, flowers opening - open thou, too: the rose!

(A small drawstring bag is thrown out of the window, landing near DEMETRIUS. As he stoops to pick it up, several red, half-size gardening tools (hoe, shovel, rake) tied in a sheath, and also a quaint, leatherbound little book are thrown down.)

RONALD

What's she giving me here?

DEMETRIUS

(examining the articles)

A bag of seed, tools, and

(leafs through the book)

a handbook on the nurture of roses, I make it.

RONALD

What does she mean by those?

(calling up to balcony)

What do you mean by those?

(to DEMETRIUS)

What does she mean by those?

DEMETRIUS

You don't see what you've got here?

RONALD

Not in the least, I don't.

DEMETRIUS

But so clearly: wherewithal!

RONALD

Wasn't it a rose I wanted?

DEMETRIUS

Look, look! Do you honestly not see the way to bring a rose out of what's been given you?

RONALD

Tending?

DEMETRIUS

And patience.

RONALD

Only I imagined everything fast as wheels. This comes out to - well, to what? to nothing - not substantial, not clear, not anything. Not enough.

DEMETRIUS

Oh, now there was a lover speaking; there I heard the tone but unmistakably! Though one would have thought, even lovers put value on a good beginning.

RONALD

All right, a beginning. More.

DEMETRIUS

But do you see how I got you that?

RONALD

Get me more, we'll talk afterwards.

DEMETRIUS

(smiles)

Lover.

(approaches the balcony again)

Look closer.

(in his previous manner to the balcony)

Luxuriant serpents stuff their skin away; the hurrying dog drops hair about the room; the wind of furious autumn strips leaves off. Nature is slipping her garments down; slip thou down, too: the scarf!

(A bolt of cloth is thrown down from the balcony. As DEMETRIUS stoops to pick it up, a cascade of needles, pins, pincushions, thimbles, scissors, and spools of thread - all a little bigger than life - comes hurtling down. RONALD picks them up.)

She certainly has an assortment of stuff up there, hasn't she?

RONALD

(examining the objects in his hands)

What were we asking for, again?

DEMETRIUS

That kerchief.

RONALD

Um. So what's all this?

DEMETRIUS

My friend, my friend, think a minute!

RONALD

What, another "beginning"?

DEMETRIUS

And is that nothing to you? No difference between being nowhere and being somewhere near?

RONALD

(with anguish)

What does she want of me?

DEMETRIUS

What do you want your own self? Shall I try and get you a note?

RONALD

Well, wouldn't it be clearer?

(DEMETRIUS crosses to the balcony and again plants himself in a familiar, insinuating attitude.)

You know, I wouldn't say you're acting all that courtly.

DEMETRIUS

There are different conventions.

(plants himself beneath the balcony and speaks as before)

The birds are yelling as the wind tears by; lions want to get more into their roaring; toads keep stepping the rhythm up, and fish may scream. Nature is giving out her mind: give thou out, too - the note!

(An inkpot, a quill, and a scroll of parchment tied with a ribbon are thrown down from the balcony. DEMETRIUS picks them up.)

RONALD

Yes? What's my reaction supposed to be here? I write the note for her?

DEMETRIUS

You do.

RONALD

Oh, come on, Demetrius!

DEMETRIUS

This is just what you should want! Oh, you are insatiable! When the woman as much as - Look;

(hold up quill, inkpot and parchment)

it's a way of saying, "Write your own ticket. Have your way."

RONALD

It's a way of saying, "Have your fancies. Think what you like," is what it's a way of saying.

(calling up to balcony;)

Isn't that what it's a way of saying?

(to DEMETRIUS)

That's what it's a way of saying.

DEMETRIUS

I'm afraid you don't get such freedom of interpretation. This, remember, Ronald, is the lady on whom you're going to be

showering all benefits: will you begin by holding back the benefit of the doubt, by imputing cruelty where you seek kindness, by supposing malice where you assert virtue? No, Ronald: the courtly lover, as he desires, so he is desired - or goes on that assumption, anyway.

RONALD

I've yet to hear one single word encouraging.

DEMETRIUS

Now wait, just a minute, let me get the significance: you're through being a courtly lover, right? - you're chucking it?

RONALD

Well, you know, Demetrius, it'd be self-deceiving -

DEMETRIUS

Right here in the streets you're going to do this?

RONALD

She doesn't want me, man!

DEMETRIUS

All right, then, that's it. Quits. Over. Fini.

RONALD

You're not leaving?

DEMETRIUS

Nothing for me here! Nothing I can do.

RONALD

You're sure?

DEMETRIUS

Well, such as?

RONALD

Well, not in the courtly way.

DEMETRIUS

I'm open to suggestions.

RONALD

In the other way.

DEMETRIUS

Beg pardon?

RONALD

In some other way.

(pause)

DEMETRIUS

I could put you on to somebody.

RONALD

Who?

DEMETRIUS

Master Sirwith. Sirwith, the Master.

RONALD

What, the animal-stuffer?

DEMETRIUS

That line of work.

RONALD

What would he have for me?

DEMETRIUS

I don't know how to answer that... except to say , I find him no end of help times like this. Like when I was having the trouble with Lucinda -

RONALD

All that courtliness and still trouble with Lucinda! Who'd have thought it?

DEMETRIUS

What do you mean - wasn't I just telling you? what about right now? Of course, here it's trivial - just a question of where some furniture's going to stand. But the situation that engendered Sirwith . . .

RONALD

What was the problem?

DEMETRIUS

You must know how things "get between" lovers - things of no importance in themselves, but as an area they try their strengths in. With no particular consequence forthcoming, she can give all her mind to seeing how far he'll go, and he, to gauging how much she'll take.

With Lucinda and me, our thing was animals - which doesn't sound earth-shaking, but that's my point. You know me, I really like animals, and that has to do with my father, I think, who began life - did you know this about your courtly friend, Ronald - that his father began life as a butcher? A butcher. But one afternoon he fell asleep in his slaughterhouse and dreamt all the animals he'd ever felled were passing in review before him, presenting like regimental banners their torn throats. That was so dramatic, he saw right away there were going to have to be some amends; so he closed up shop and put his money into a stud-farm. At the same time, he set off on a course of venery, as being, I suppose, the other side of the coin. It was the

animal business that brought him in contact with Sirwith; I don't know the exact connection.

Well, you know, the converts are the fanatics: I had to behave to animals - it would be understating it to say, as if they were human; no, but as if pigs were uncles and rabbits your dear friends. By the way, do you know why rabbits have more fun than people?

RONALD

Because there are more rabbits?

DEMETRIUS

No - fewer people. Now Lucinda had been reared just the other way: to care for nothing that's alive except people, and not too many of them. So we had this between us, to keep us - how did I put it? - "gauging" each other. And it would come up constantly - well, you know the number of animals that go around this city. Like say, we'd be out walking, and ^{I'd} stop to chuckle a dog or right a derailed beetle - and then it would start: pick-pick-pick, that woman's impatient heel picking the pavement. Oh, the associations I had for that sound! Such hardness! Such incomprehension! This was the woman I love, remember; but I was getting so that thinking of her meant thinking pick-a-pick-pick, and that was all it meant, everything else, every grace and virtue driven out of mind. I used to say, if you could have her heart out of her flesh, that'd be how you'd hear the beating: pick, pick-a-pick-pick.

Something had to be done.

The way lovers do, we had a game of messages. There really wasn't the least necessity: Lucinda was on her own, and my father, well, bolluxing a match would be the last thing in his mind,

as is proved by the fact that, when he got wind of our game, not only didn't he object, he offered us Sirwith for the go-between. Now Sirwith, as you'll realize when you meet him, is irrepressible: he always has a mouse in his pocket or a grass-snake curled round his wrist; and I saw the way to take advantage. Going on the assumption that every exposure to Sirwith brought with it another exposure to Sirwith's "kingdom" (I call it that), I made Lucinda play messages till it was coming out her ears; and do you know - it worked! Oh, she would feel all disgusted at first, but you couldn't help being touched the way the old man got on with those little fellas. So when Sirwith reported that her disgust seemed to be lessening, I instructed him to try her on some fiercer animals: mongeese, retrievers, boars - and it was still all right - so long as we watched the margin. But the day he carried my proposal of marriage, he took along a panther; and as Lucinda dictated her acceptance, she put a hand into the panther's mouth.

RONALD

That's very interesting. I don't see what it has to do with my situation.

DEMETRIUS

Well, now, you know, it's Sirwith's special gift, I think, that although his skills are limited, whatever your needs are, he finds a way of relating them. Which is what makes me say: To Sirwith! Shall we?

RONALD

I'm agreeable.

(They start to exit; RONALD turns back.)

Oh, wait; I was forgetting.

(up to the balcony)

Did you hear that now, Elysse? Do you hear all the trouble I'm taking?

(Exit RONALD and DEMETRIUS.)

Scene II

(The door of ELYSSE's house opens and ELYSSE steps out.)

ELYSSE

As if one were ever given the opportunity to hear something else! He doesn't take up enough of my life, but he has to go out after more people now, fancier plotting.

(looking in the direction RONALD exited.)

Maybe, instead, you could just let me be? No, that, that, of course, wouldn't ever occur to you.

(She goes around the stage picking up the things she threw down in the previous scene, speaking as she goes.)

Pester is all you know how to do, with your ideas, and your talking. And self-favoring? Did anyone ever hear such a muddle! Love's a wind, a flower, a flame, this, that. Well, if that's so, how's a woman who won't love any different or any worse than a wind not blowing at present, a bud unopened, a straw that won't catch? There's some of your own reasoning for you, not that you've much use for it away from your inclination, oh no. You irritate me out ~~out~~ of my mind, trying to set me at fault - as if there ever could be any! Oh, and that threatening! I'm going to get mine, is what you're really saying with your roses and your flames. You think I really don't feel a difference when I'm charmed from when I'm scared? You think I can take the tenderness and let the pressure go? But undertones of danger.

have been written into your serenading and the bad harmony turns me from you. I don't like what you have to sing - you or Demetrius - though when it was his voice, I rose to the tune a little. You're like dogs, the both of you, jaws up for a peach to drop off a bough. But there was a dog who chose a painted bough and famished. You think about that.

(Enter LUCINDA. She looks quizzically at ELYSSE, who can barely keep hold of all the stuff she has picked up.)

LUCINDA

Elysse, what are you doing with all that?

ELYSSE

I'm just gathering it up.

(LUCINDA still quizzical. ELYSSE goes on with elaborate simplicity:)

I had to throw it down and now I'm gathering it up.

LUCINDA

My dear, I appreciate it's not easy to throw away old things -

ELYSSE

I wasn't meaning to throw them away. . .

LUCINDA

But as I was just about to say, it's a very needful discipline. I mean, you have got to learn! Otherwise, you don't get a corner of your house to yourself. What with melon rinds and bedding and cracked cups - oh, they get in there! they make you feel an interloper behind your own doors!

ELYSSE

But Lucinda, these aren't things I want to be rid of. I wasn't just dispensing them, I took very precise aim.

(ELYSSE drops the bolt of cloth.)

LUCINDA

(as she picks up the bolt of cloth and hands it back to ELYSSE)

He must be off his chop, you know, that one. I mean your Ronald.

ELYSSE

(just a trace of resentment)

What makes you say that?

LUCINDA

Well, just to stand there and let you shy all this.

ELYSSE

Oh, dear, I wasn't bombarding him; there were just some things needed saying.

LUCINDA

Well, no one could accuse you of mincing words.

ELYSSE

No, well, they were difficult things.

LUCINDA

What? that you won't be bothered?

(ELYSSE drops the scroll; LUCINDA picks it up and hands it back to her.)

I don't see any great difficulty there. I also don't see why you're troubling to get all your stuff back. If it was me, I'd be thinking myself well rid.

ELYSSE

Because I'm going to need it the next time as the last. Because I always have to be regrouping my defenses.

LUCINDA

You lamb! Oh, that pesty Ronald! That mooning, importuning whipper!

ELYSSE

You don't want to be too hard on him, Lucinda. He thinks he means well.

LUCINDA

Oh, what they think they mean! You don't have to tell me about that; I've got one who'd be explaining himself till the cows come home.

ELYSSE

Yes, he was here, too.

LUCINDA

(off balance)

Hm?

ELYSSE

Your husband was here with Ronald.

LUCINDA

Now that's a bit of too much!

ELYSSE

Well, I'm glad you think so, because, I was a little leary of coming out and saying it, but I think so, too.

LUCINDA

What do you mean, you think so, too? You say you don't want one of them and you're dangling two of them.

ELYSSE

Oh, now, Lucinda, you don't really think -

LUCINDA

Which gives me my doubts about your not wanting the one to begin with. Because, for all they say about fatal attractions, men don't

keep after a woman unless she wants them there.

ELYSSE

Now, Lucinda, come on. Do you think I'd ever have told you -

LUCINDA

She may not say it, they may not know it, but she wants 'em there

ELYSSE

It's true Demetrius was here -

LUCINDA

It makes you shudder to think sometimes what she wants 'em
for . . .

ELYSSE

- but he was here to advise Ronald, that's all.

LUCINDA

To advise Ronald?

ELYSSE

Now you mustn't ~~think~~ think for a moment I blame you; but, dear,
really, one has enough on one's hands . . .

LUCINDA

He's now such an expert, my husband, that he's called in to advise
Ronald?

ELYSSE

(smiling)

I'm sure he must be something of an expert to have won a sweet
elegance like yourself.

LUCINDA

Thanks, dear - but it's thanks on my account, not his. This
was no streets-aflame lover. Couldn't talk to me as I like.

In fact, those days he didn't say much at all. He had a way of grunting his syllables which I told him - one day just out and told him - that I could not endure. After that he sends hungry little notes - not even bringing his own notes round, but using an old animal trainer - I think trainer; anyhow, he had some connection with animals. Well, I enjoyed the old man - "Sirwith," the name was; he showed me how to enjoy myself with animals, which is something I never had been able to do. But all the time I knew my lover was there in the shadows, and why didn't he come?

ELYSSE

This, I must say, this, comes as a surprise. At my window, watching the life of your house, I could never have guessed this, not some time ago, not any time. You seem to do your marriage so beautifully. When Ron started in on me, your place was crumbling, not only deserted. And even when you first moved in, I didn't get the change all at once - but is that a wonder, when I'd been staring at that house all my life and never once saw the possibilities? It's just this last while I have: in the light of your scraping and scrubbing and all those wonderful goings-on ...

(getting a little hazy; speaking with half-closed eyes, as if visualizing what she speaks)

The scaffolding fell, men in livery came out to polish the knobs. Evening fell, coaches rattled, the windows glared, and music swayed through my sleep - Oh, lovely! Oh, life!

(Her eyes open.)

I don't find it easy to connect you with problems you're so beautifully over.

LUCINDA

Maybe you're one of those people who gets on with animals and

I sound silly, but understand: I had the whole brute creation forced upon me!

ELYSSE

It must be a terrible thing, even to be done with.

LUCINDA

You keep saying, "done with". But anything but! We're always at it: Storming. Coldness. To take an example: now, just now, we're having a falling out over - again, I suppose this is going to sound tiny - over some furniture placement.

ELYSSE

In that beautifully run house!

LUCINDA

Demetrius wants a double, and I want singles at a fair distance. You ought to be able to understand that.

ELYSSE

Oh, I do.

LUCINDA

Yes, but try making Demetrius. That's the gateway to melodrama.

ELYSSE

It's, as you say, rather a small thing.

LUCINDA

Small? My dear, you don't begin to fathom the bottomless triviality: what he sees in it, what I see in it - on we go. And as we go on, we get reduced; so that once, he began pushing the beds closer - a quarter of an inch a night, so's to be (can you believe this?) imperceptible! Only he hit trouble with

the carpet: we'd rather a bold pattern at the time and the moves were showing up, so to get round that he changes to herringbone, until finally I couldn't hold off asking, Did he really suppose, all questions of pattern aside, there wouldn't come a point when I'd notice, when I'd simply, purely be bound to notice?

ELYSSE

Yes, well -

LUCINDA

Well, that's all only to give you an idea. In this particular case I happen to have his number, in the form of a little device which I expect to lay hands on shortly...

ELYSSE

Your troubles put a weight into your advice that not even that breathtaking elegance -

LUCINDA

I'm what? Oh, now dear, I'm this, I'm that, but "breathtakingly elegant..."

ELYSSE

Exactly describes you! The only really elegant woman in my experience. Who ever showed yellow to this street before you moved in with your panes sparkling. And the parties, the livries, the gleaming knobs...

LUCINDA

Well, if that's your idea of elegance -

ELYSSE

It certainly is!

LUCINDA

(shrewdly)

What exactly is it I'm being asked to do for you?

ELYSSE

A dog is beneath a fruit tree. He waits and waits. Make me free.

LUCINDA

The subject is Ronald?

ELYSSE

(wearily - a little crazily)

Ronald, Ronald.

LUCINDA

Shooing him away?

ELYSSE

I do have this sense he deserves better.

LUCINDA

A way of putting it, then?

ELYSSE

The elegant way.

LUCINDA

Fabrication. They're not noted for being so classy...

(She thinks a moment.)

Oh, but wait a minute - here it is. There have to be spells - you think Ronald could be got to believe it?

ELYSSE

I don't see why not. He's anxious to believe things.

LUCINDA

That's so right. All right: so as I understand it, what bothers

Ronald is not so much you don't love him, but you don't have a reason.

ELYSSE

No harm, of course, in his being a little irrational, but the privilege of saying, "Because I don't - period" is not for the likes of me.

LUCINDA

Well, you know, pet, if he wants a reason, I think he ought to have one.

ELYSSE

Well, why don't you pass that little endorsement on to Ronald, he'd be so gratified.

LUCINDA

I only mean, if he's not going to get you, he might at least get an explanation.

ELYSSE

Yes, but dear, it's not as if I were being evasive; I really haven't got one.

LUCINDA

Well, that's my plan: to get one for you. To find you a terrible, implacable reason against love. Not just his love - any. And, of course, it has to be a reason you can't do anything about. You had yourself a reason like that, that wouldn't leave Ronald a good great deal to say.

ELYSSE

But I haven't.

LUCINDA

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But I have; and here it is. You're going to claim, you didn't come into the world what you are -

ELYSSE

He'll buy that, I daresay.

LUCINDA

- no human parents; never before the eighteenth year looked out from behind a human face.

ELYSSE

My goodness, what then?

LUCINDA

You're going to say, you began your life as a bull.

ELYSSE

(with an ironic pout)

Oh, dear, not even a cow?

LUCINDA

An enchanter gave you this life; but what you have you have on the terrible condition never to love. Of course the enchanter wasn't forgetting that a bull, even a humanized bull, might have some trouble keeping the sensual nature down. So to be fair, and help you with your condition, he formed you a slip of a girl; with the result that now, even if your desires do betray you, the means of fulfillment don't lie easy to hand. But if ever you should love, wham! - right back into the bull with you.

ELYSSE

You know, that's a beautifully clever thing, Lucinda. Though it does rather give one the creeps. Because I remember once

hearing of a girl who really did have that happen to her, or something like: she got turned into an animal... Miss Ripple-switch, I think the name was. I can't now bring to mind which animal, or why.

LUCINDA

Let's hope it gives Ronald the creeps, dear.

ELYSSE

(fascinated by a speculation)

Yes, I know, but I mean, if it really had happened to a person, what you say, they wouldn't afterwards remember the animal state, would they? Which makes it almost possible for it to have happened.

LUCINDA

Don't follow, dear. I'm glad I struck something so convincing, though.

ELYSSE

Only, why would enchanters give a condition like that?

LUCINDA

Oh, you're the enemy to love - I'll leave that to you. You have my contribution.

ELYSSE

Then you won't mind if when the time comes, I embroider a little?

LUCINDA

Heavens, no, Elysse. It's your story; it's for you.

ELYSSE

Because there'll be just a point or two I'll want to embellish. Oh, but Lucinda, thanks! This is a weacon!

LUCINDA

Time to see to my own armament, what with the siege of the herringbone impending. Basically, what I need's a trap.

ELYSSE

That mind can't want for strategems.

LUCINDA

No, I don't mean a strategem, I mean a trap - you know, like for jackrabbits, with springs and iron - to set between the beds. Ramble down to the shops, shall we, and I'll pour out my problem. Or perhaps you'd be good enough to help?

(ELYSSE nods enthusiastically. They go out.)

Scene III

(Enter DEMETRIUS, RONALD and SIRWITH.)

DEMETRIUS

(to SIRWITH)

Well, old friend! Since the priest spoke the words, I don't seem to see much of you.

SIRWITH

They fall away.

DEMETRIUS

Not but what it's the course of things. Demetrius wed requires other service than Demetrius wooing.

SIRWITH

You don't see much of me, but others see much of me.

DEMETRIUS

Natural as leaves. But I wouldn't ever stop wishing you well, Sirwith: Prosper the servant reliable!

SIRWITH

Known to be that - and prosper.

RONALD

Sir, my friend - and to no shame of his be it spoken (that matchless courtier!) - my friend (to start again) is loathe to give me a character of your services. But from the lips of the doer I am in hopes now to hear the things done.

SIRWITH

Put it in words, words, words?

RONALD

If, Sir, you would be so kind as to be so kind. And I do not question idly. Should the services of which you speak be the services at which I guess, they are such as poor lovers dream on.

SIRWITH

A young man here, one there.

RONALD

It wants only to add: here is the poorest of lovers.

SIRWITH

I doctor.

RONALD

(to DEMETRIUS)

Friend! Do you hold my sufferings to be such as leech may lessen?

SIRWITH

But I doctor. O, I heal!

DEMETRIUS

Well, now, Sirwith's not quite doing himself justice - are you, Sirwith? - no, you're not, quite.

(to RONALD)

You don't fly to Sirwith with a hangnail or a chip-tooth. No, what Sirwith likes, is something a little tricky -

(to SIRWITH)

Explain yourself, old friend.

SIRWITH

Well, young sir, an animal doctor, to set my skills out.

RONALD

(to DEMETRIUS)

Further and further from our purpose!

DEMETRIUS

Oh, I don't think so, Ronald. Hear Sirwith!

SIRWITH

By which, I don't mean doctoring beasts - no. But doctoring men by their means.

RONALD

Puzzling more and more!

SIRWITH

Men by the beasts' means. Fin, feather and hair. Other creations to stem the wastage off our own.

DEMETRIUS

Could you maybe give an example, Sirwith?

SIRWITH

That I shall. There was this pastor whose legs were giving out. Bad, buckling legs - got him nowhere. There wasn't a thing the doctors could do, and prayer just jellied the knees more, so he slips his gualms into his pocket, and pays a call: What will

Sirwith do? Well, I took the offending limb and put in some muscle tissue from a hind; because, with the legs at fault, you want to get the leggiest thing in creation into your treatment, and that would be the hind, surest runner of the forest. My pastor went on to develop the best legs in the parish, which was quite some blessing for him, considering the amount he had to run down.

RONALD

I thought there was something about its being impossible to mix men and animals that way.

SIRWITH

Impossible, young sir? Easy as old shoes! Nothing easier!

RONALD

I must wonder, then, that more leeches have not recourse to, nor sick men desire, of so sure a mend.

SIRWITH

Well, there's a disadvantage or two, one or two.

RONALD

You mean the relief isn't permanent?

SIRWITH

Oh, just lasts and lasts! But - well, now, in the case of that pastor: he called back one day, very grateful, very spry, but also (I couldn't help thinking) a shade melancholic, because he said things like, "Ah, Sirwith, thou has healed, but better perhaps to have let be. What is this world for which thou hast ~~fitted~~ ^{fitted} me but a great forest through which hell-hounds pursue the servants of the Lord?" I asked, had anything in particular happened to bring him to that view of things: no, he said, no;

but from the time the incisions closed, he hadn't seemed to be able to take any other view. Pastoral duties were the first to go, then everything went. He wanted to have all his time free for brisk walks in the woods, where he could keep, on the whole, out of reach. If he did happen to meet someone, he would prance up to them and say: "Woe to thee that thou dost thirst!" and on being assured that his interlocutor did not, in fact, thirst, would only paw fretfully and cry, "Thou dost, thou dost thirst: after my heart's blood thou thirstest!"

DEMETRIUS

It was a price to pay.

SIRWITH

Good legs I gave that fellow, though. Shapely. Michelangelo.

But you won't be getting any idea of my skill! Legs... - big flat tissue, a tendon to stitch up - nothing! I certainly wouldn't want you to think I pride myself on legs! Maybe you'd better hear some of my more delicate work.

RONALD

I think I'd better hear as much as I can.

SIRWITH

I think my prize job for delicacy was a revenue man here in the capital, and it entailed eyes. Could you say what goes into eyes? What? Fluid, membrane - that's all. A little bag of water. Scarcely a physical thing at all, the eye - a Matterhorn of delicacy. Well, now, this fellow, this tax man, went and blinded himself staring into an oil lamp.

DEMETRIUS

What in the world did he do that for?

SIRWITH

It was helping him think, he said. I fixed him up with a set of bat's eyes.

DEMETRIUS

Now wait a minute: aren't bats blind?

RONALD

I thought they were.

SIRWITH

But they get about, you see, and that's what he wanted: to be able to get about. I mean, he was blind anyway, and if he wouldn't be getting his vision back, at least he could be sure of not smashing into things. So I had a success - and one of my strangest.

RONALD

I suppose he wasn't any worse off...

SIRWITH

Oh, better - indisputably. Except for one little thing. He began to have the feeling that he was always out of season, one too many; that whatever moment he picked to come round for his taxes would be the wrong moment; that he was constantly getting in people's hair, as you might say. Also, he was beginning to put out webs between his fingers, with the result that he couldn't properly take hold of anything. So he was out a job: a tax-gatherer who won't barge and can't grasp isn't of much use. He never bumps into anything now - or anybody, either. Oh, while the spirit seems to be moving me, let me tell you about this farmer I treated for severe burns. He'd been harvesting grapes all day and went and tangled his toes in a smoke-pot. Went up like a Christmas pudding. My solution was to graft on some sloth-hide -

DEMETRIUS

- and, while the graft took beautifully, no one has ever been able to get a day's work from him since.

(to RONALD)

This was the Farmer on Green Mountain, a tenant of ours.

SIRWITH

I suppose I might have foreseen there'd be some little compensation - there always does seem to be - but I did have this cut of sloth-hide fitting so perfectly...

(to RONALD)

But I hope the young sir won't all this while be thinking me a bumpkin-doctor, with nobody but farmers and parsons and excise-men for a clientele. The King himself, Leone the Unpredictable, whom fame adores - even this great soul has passed beneath the hands of Sirwith. He had smashed up his neck hunting and I put in some lion-clavicle. That did him - and made my fortune. Light of our Days! Leone the Just, the Beneficent!

DEMETRIUS

I can remember a time he might have deserved that praise. When did you do your operation?

SIRWITH

Uh - this could already be under the heading of talking too much.

DEMETRIUS

Sirwith, you've hardly opened your mouth. When was the operation?

SIRWITH

Seven years ago this week.

DEMETRIUS

And then, allowing for recuperation and therapy, how long before the King was back at his desk again?

SIRWITH

Eleven months.

DEMETRIUS

Six years and one month ago this week, Leone emerged from the studious retirement in which he had hitherto persevered and began to make war on the Goat Country.

SIRWITH

True - I remember the date clearly because it was on the eve of that campaign, with the first rounds of artillery sounding in my ears, that I performed my most masterly transplant. It was a lawyer and his heart: I put in some arterial work I'd picked out of a wolf's breast, and he was back in there slugging in no time.

RONALD

Would I know that lawyer?

SIRWITH

Now which was it again...? Oh yes; Messer Whipple.

RONALD

Whipple! - who conspired with the uncles to drive father off our estate; who would have clapped mother in the madhouse and me in the galleys if he could!

SIRWITH

He did develop into a bad one, didn't he? You're not the only sufferer. When I think of the way he sank his fangs into poor Chancel, the builder - another client of mine, incidentally. He was the one I fitted out with a fresh pituitary plucked from a swordfish. So that whereas churches used to be his forte, he's building bridges now.

DEMETRIUS

If you're trying to say he took on the nature of a fish, I should

think bridges would be the last thing in his mind.

SIRWITH

Close as he could come, however.

DEMETRIUS

As it was a swordfish, he might equally well have signed for a soldier.

SIRWITH

Oh, he serves in the militia.

DEMETRIUS

Lucky you didn't take your gland from a shark.

SIRWITH

After my experience with the lawyer, you see.

RONALD

You know what I've been wondering, Sirwith, hearing all this: Is any part of you animal?

SIRWITH

Ah, now, young sir, that's sly of you! What a sly young sir it is, hey wally-ho creak!

RONALD

That's all right, I'm not going to have a thing to do with you till I know.

SIRWITH

Well, then: my legs never bore hind from hound; nor my eyes looked out from a bat's sockets. When I'm slothful, it's on my own back; and stiff-necked in my own neck. I have a heart free from wolfishness; and none of my glands ever swam about undersea. Yet, sir, for all that, I wouldn't claim to be the man (breathes there

one such?) in no way animal, or - what comes to the same thing - animal no way.

DEMETRIUS

All right, very adequate. Now what's to be done about getting this sinner the woman he wants?

SIRWITH

Lord Demetrius, you should be helping me! I am a doctor -

RONALD

And I, an illness, all excess and disorder through desiring her whose perfections -

SIRWITH

Ah, I take it on your word she's fair as May, June - the whole fair side of the calender. And if it were a question of a transplant, I'd move heaven and earth -

DEMETRIUS

Everybody kept their organs when Sirwith broke Lucinda's mind.

SIRWITH

Why aren't you helping me?

(to RONALD)

Or if it were messages you wanted, all right- that I do.

RONALD

What!

(in blank verse)

Shall form of words the burning cherishing love -

DEMETRIUS

That'll do, Ron. Now, look, Sirwith, I don't know why you're giving me such a hard time and I don't like it. You may be, as you say, manflesh through and through, but you're a fox's mind,

perfectly well capable (as who knows better than I?) of schemes to melt the heart of a young December. Out with one!

SIRWITH

Then a word in your ear, old master; I'm something shy of your friend yet.

(SIRWITH whispers in DEMETRIUS' ear; growing expression of pleasure on DEMETRIUS' face.)

DEMETRIUS

Oh, Sirwith, that is great!

(glances off)

Ach! Here comes my plague of a wife back.

RONALD

Am I not to be told?

DEMETRIUS

To be shown, dear friend, to be shown. Only, do me a favor, will you; beat it on out of here now, go home with Sirwith -

(glances off)

And hurry! She's stomping along!

SIRWITH

(looking RONALD over as if mentally fitting him him for a suit of clothes)

Yes, I think the cow-suit probably will do. Or it did in the other case.

RONALD

Cow-suit!

DEMETRIUS

(to SIRWITH)

Get him back when you've got him dressed.

(SIRWITH still scrutinizing RONALD's dimensions)

Only, come on now, Sirwith, fold your tents! All she has to do is get one glimpse of you here -

RONALD

I'm to be dressed? In a cow-suit? By him? After what I've heard? Come on, I'd be chomping grass before the snaps were snapped.

DEMETRIUS

That cannot be gone into now. Sirwith: explain as you go - and go!

RONALD

Couldn't it be a bull-suit, at least?

DEMETRIUS

Not if we're to turn a profit on Miss Rippleswitch - that's the whole point!

(RONALD begins to make another protest)

Oh, it's hopeless! Sirwith, get him out of this; she's storming through the gate.

SIRWITH

(to RONALD)

Come on, young sir, we'll look after thee.

(SIRWITH ushers a very reluctant RONALD off. DEMETRIUS looks anxiously after them; then turns and composes himself.)

Scene IV

(Enter LUCINDA, looking very aggravated.)

DMETRIUS

What ho, my duck? - to risk a polite question.

LUCINDA

But nothing - not a thing! Oh, this place! You wouldn't believe

where I've been looking.

DEMETRIUS

I wouldn't believe what you'd been looking for, either, if I didn't have it from your own lips. Lucinda and her trap.

LUCINDA

All other means having failed.

LUCINDA DEMETRIUS

And your husband not yet pacified.

LUCINDA

I want you to love me...

DEMETRIUS

Yes, the snap of the trap is going to convey your affection very eloquently.

(He takes hold of her.)

Snap-snap-snap.

(On each "snap" he draws her a little closer)

LUCINDA

I don't want to have to protect myself. You lay into me.

DEMETRIUS

And the lady doesn't care to be got at?

LUCINDA

Stop there, don't say another word, but listen to yourself! "Got at," "got at" - just that view of it! - "get at her". Only, you be careful you leave something to get at!

DEMETRIUS

My idea of marriage -

LUCINDA

Oh, your idea of marriage! A snake swallowing his tail and

continuing on up the torso till he reaches the digestion.

DEMETRIUS

Contiguous beds is all I'm asking for; not a double and all you seem to feel that implies. Though of course, to be honest, what I always really want is to seal your life in mine.

LUCINDA

Yes, you do, I know it, and I can't live in that airlessness, even when it's you cutting the air off. Most especially when it's you: because, why do you think I need all these moments to myself, enough moments so that it comes out to having a life to myself? Only for this: for thinking out your love more clearly.

DEMETRIUS

I don't get these problems.

LUCINDA

No, but I do; and isn't it enough for you - really, shouldn't it be reason enough - that I do get them?

DEMETRIUS

It's so contrary to what they usually want, women.

LUCINDA

Is it? I'm not given to all those generalizations about my sex that my sex are given to. I only know myself, but very well - oh, and you; or, I thought so, but there seems to be a vein of triviality quite unguessed-at.

DEMETRIUS

That is so irritating! The way you just assume anything you don't care about nobody else in the world is going to either. I think maybe that's the most irritating thing I've ever had to put up with in my life.

LUCINDA

Well, but, darling, what does it come down to? A few inches of carpet...

DEMETRIUS

Not if you think along with me, it won't be that. Suppose a quicksands. Suppose rivers. Suppose jungle, fire. Suppose any terrible incisive thing and you will be close on my own thoughts.

LUCINDA

Oh, really, a few inches - !

DEMETRIUS

You keep saying that. But those inches of darkness take their character, and it's the limit insuperable. I go across that space like a polar sea.

LUCINDA

The floors are tile and they're cold.

DEMETRIUS

I venture onto that darkness like a lost one.

LUCINDA

Comfort after darkness!

DEMETRIUS

Ah, but Lucinda, I married to put those dark spaces out of my life.

LUCINDA

(irritably)

This whole discussion is so "married"!

(pause)

Did you really think I wasn't going to notice?

DEMETRIUS

Not notice what?

EUCINDA

That you were moving the beds closer. Did you really seriously suppose there wouldn't come a point when I'd notice?

DEMETRIUS

But then ...

LUCINDA

Um?

DEMETRIUS

I thought there'd come a point when you'd be touched.

(LUCINDA turns derisively away.)

Not remembering how you'd gone cold on me, Like the soup one forgets arguing across the table.

LUCINDA

All right, then: quiet and eat your soup!

DEMETRIUS

I'm fascinated by that phrase, it's so unexpectedly right: "gone cold on me..." Cold as that witch across the way.

(gestures at ELYSSE's house)

LUCINDA

Who - Elysse? That sweet girl?

(then suspiciously)

What does she have to do with it?

DEMETRIUS

Only that she's the thing my lady is getting to remind me of.

LUCINDA

I mean, what do you know about her being cold or not?

DEMETRIUS

Discussion with the lover.

LUCINDA

That insensate boy? He's got her at wit's end, poor Elysse.

DEMETRIUS

Poor Elysse to whom you've been giving aid and comfort.

LUCINDA

You don't seem exactly a stranger to the counsels of Ronald.

DEMETRIUS

Why shouldn't I help my friend with the girl he loves?

LUCINDA

Why shouldn't I help mine shake a nuisance?

DEMETRIUS

And so on goes the campaign against the fair passion, this as your new front.

LUCINDA

Well, don't think I'm neglecting the old one. I'm off now to see after the trap.

DEMETRIUS

You've been having some difficulty there, eh?

LUCINDA

Well, the hardware people happened to be all out. So I ran round to some homes - quite a number, actually: Messer Whipple, Messer Chancel, the Farmer Upon Green Mountain -

DEMETRIUS

What in the world did you think people like that would be doing with traps?

LUCINDA

- and that tax-gatherer with the funny hands -

(just hearing him; incredulous)

Did you just ask me what they'd be doing with traps?

DEMETRIUS

That was it.

LUCINDA

But seriously?

DEMETRIUS

What, is there some special reason? I mean, farmers, builders...

LUCINDA

Oh, they all came equipped.

DEMETRIUS

Really?

LUCINDA

But there was not a trap available. In use.

DEMETRIUS

You're going to tell me, it's a fairly general thing around here for people to set each other traps in the bedclothes

LUCINDA

Oh, all husbands don't require that.

DEMETRIUS

Don't say?

LUCINDA

But then, all husbands aren't this stupid.

DEMETRIUS

Right. Well, my stupidity is still wondering, what's all the traps for?

LUCINDA

Do you really not know?

DEMETRIUS

Darling, it is surprising that with your overwhelming confidence in my dulness, you won't credit me with a little ignorance.

LUCINDA

Careful, Demetrius: play the ironist with me, and where are you going to be plain. Careful, careful! Now think back to the new moon: it was then, remember, that the Great Bull broke from Leone's zoo, and everyone thought, with that bull bucking around town, they'd better get themselves a trap.

DEMETRIUS

Oh, yes, what ever did happen to that bull?

LUCINDA

(more incredulous than ever)

Do you really not know?

DEMETRIUS

Ah, but I'm never tired of hearing you tell it.

LUCINDA

Careful, careful. Bull escaped to Green Mountain, and the city lives in fear.

DEMETRIUS

I'd forgotten.

LUCINDA

Master of Western Thought!

DEMETRIUS

Careful-in-your-turn. I had the impression everyone had forgotten.

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LUCINDA

Well, as you can see, everyone hasn't forgotten. Traps are in use.

DEMETRIUS

Whose's over?

LUCINDA

Oh, now, there, my lord and master, there - we never had one.

I heard bellows every time the wind rose, but you - well, I'm not sure what you were: amused, I suppose, at the idea of a bull trotting around the capital.

DEMETRIUS

And so in that happy time the Demetrius household was trapless. You may have to give up your idea yet.

LUCINDA

Oh, I've still a place or two; and now, with Elyse helping me - I never knew these things to be absolutely impossible to come by.

DEMETRIUS

You would know.

LUCINDA

I would find out.

DEMETRIUS

Lucinda!

(She gives him all her attention.)

You have relaid a knife over our marriage. Refuse to bring down that knife.

LUCINDA

(In exasperation)

Husbands! Knaves!

(In another tone)

Traps!

(Exit LUCINDA)

Scene V

DEMETRIUS

You know what's a very curious expression? "Helpmeet."
 Help. Meet. What would I ever be about that that woman could help me with it? Or, riddle me: how is a crab wife like poison in the veins? Reply: in that she leaves a coldness wherever she passes. It's the answer, but I'd be a favored man if the likeness stopped there. Now you know me, I'd just as soon start my day like a rabbit from ^{the} burrow, but I don't get one step into the morning before she's brought her fangs down and the juice is in there working. I'd say she'd had her fangs into the neighbor girl, too, if I didn't know that one's an arctic winter in her own right. All poison, these women; ice and poison. Therefore - antidote! Therefore - kindling!

(Enter RONALD, completely dressed in a cow costume, but carrying the head-piece in his hands.)

Oh, Ronald, that is something! Sirwith never did me up like that.

RONALD

Yes, well, I'm nervous.

DEMETRIUS

Why be that? You look odd, but we've had queer ones before around here. Or is it, nervous you'll be recognized? My poor friend, if you'll only consider what multitudes of snakes and dogs pass for a human creature, I'm sure you'll allow man some claim on the animal nature.

RONALD

The cow I can manage.

DEMETRIUS

So then?

RONALD

But Sirwith tells a little too good a story.

DEMETRIUS

Does he?

RONALD

I can feel the teats swelling already. But I am not interested in a dairy career, Demetrius. I'm not giving any!

DEMETRIUS

Giving any?

RONALD

Not a pail.

DEMETRIUS

Saints forbid you should do anything so useful.

(looks off)

Oh - here Elysse comes.

RONALD

I can't let her see me in this!

DEMETRIUS

Perhaps you'll remember it was our whole object she should see you in this. Planting that little seed, remember? First, though, there's some topsoil to plough up. Into the alley with you.

RONALD

(starts to retire into the alley; then:)

If you notice me beginning to chew my cud, slap me!

(DEMETRIUS bustles him into the alley.
Enter ELYSSE, very annoyed.)

ELYSSE

(makes for her house door, then turns out)

This was really provoking! Heaven bear witness, I hadn't a thought in my head but to do this favor for Lucinda, save her a moment while she was inquiring at the pastor's. That - and that alone - took me to the Royal Palace; I'd like to know what else anyone might suggest could have drawn me there! Just an inquiry after traps; nothing in the world to do with my own affairs or anything I care about. And yet they snigger, and I go down the halls and there's impudence below every wig. When they're like that it's usually a snap or a seam, but everything's just right. Then why am I being treated like this, here when I'm being kind enough to put my own crosses out of mind? Why am I being made to feel that tense collected way a woman hates feeling? Stalking the royal halls toward the apartment of the Court Hunter, I have a sensation of too much clothes, and seeking the cause of the encumbrance, I find I have taken on those sniggers as a train of flowers dragging off my skirt. The Court Hunter, I rather assumed, would be kind, because there were such shining panels around his chamber - and then what does he go and do? He just lets himself be the voice for all the sniggers: I ask for my trap, and "Hey, Wally-ho, Miss: Have ye not learned the other means to keep young Ronald by ye?" Now that's really an insult, and hot as I was, I didn't fail to notice how the brunt of it lands on Ronald, not on me. Oaths, metaphors - silly he is: but no one is going to get away with calling him "Inconstant". Not that I see me ever loving ~~him~~^{him}, but a person deserves his credit. All of which makes me in no hurry to get on with that plan of Lucinda's. It being now the hour of his daily symphony - second movement - I'll to my window and get it all. For though he moves not my mind, certainly his words give pleasure in the hearing and matter for my reflection.

(She goes into her house. From the first mention of his name RONALD has been trying to get to ELYSSE, but DEMETRIUS has restrained him.)

RONALD

Can I be hearing what I hear? Elysse and a kind word. Kind words from Elysse! - oh, heaven of my fortunes, there's a conjunction for which I'd ceased to scan.

DEMETRIUS

Just put on your cow's head, we'll talk later. I wonder what it was she said, "that plan of Lucinda's" ...

(RONALD still staring blissfully after ELYSSE)

You've got to hurry, she has only to climb her stairs and walk out. Everybody and his brother I have to hurry.

RONALD

(begins to take off the suit)

Away, these obscenities! My lady has spoke, and her speech is kindly.

DEMETRIUS

Have you ever heard of following up an advantage?

RONALD

That's exactly what I mean to do.

DEMETRIUS

What do you think you've heard, that's making you so exultant?

RONALD

"Constancy", "pleasure to the ears".

DEMETRIUS

I believe I also caught something about her not ever loving you.

RONALD

That was restraint, you see.

DEMETRIUS

I see. If she speaks against your wishes, it's restraint; when you're hearing what you like to hear, effusion.

RONALD

I heard enough to know there's no need of cow-hide.

DEMETRIUS

More need than ever! You don't appreciate what a very snaky plan has been worked out for you: everything followed from getting Elysse into a certain disposition. Well, now, without meaning to - and how she'd rage if she knew! - my woman has apparently gone and set her some task that's done our business. All right; then the next thing -

RONALD

- is to speak the love that will not be silent, bare the heart that will no longer lie concealed -

DEMETRIUS

Ronald, it embarrasses me to have to keep calling you back to this, but it's what I'm here for: now if you've really got, as you say, any aspiration to any sort of courtliness -

RONALD

(snaps his fingers as if suddenly remembering something, and his impatience subsides at once)

Oh, that's right. All right, then, on we go, courtly it is.

DEMETRIUS

Good. Now put on your cow-head. Wait, is the tear-gimmick working?

RONALD

Watch.

(He puts on the head-piece. There is a creaking noise,

and a strip of pale blue gauze issues from each eye-opening of the cow-head. A number of purple satin tears are pasted to each strip.)

DEMETRIUS

Fine. Now haul 'em in.

(The creaking noise again; the strips of gauze are drawn up into the eye-openings.)

Now get down as if you were going to crawl, and I'll slip this lead on.

(RONALD gets down; DEMETRIUS produces a looped rope and slips it around the "COW's" neck. The COW makes a vaguely impatient noise and gesture.)

And I think maybe I'd better hitch you -

(- this last half to himself. He leads the COW into the alley, hitches it to a railing or post there.)

- and now we're ready for the woman.

(ELYSSE appears on her balcony.)

ELYSSE

A little air before the speeches start. Oh, how sultry!

DEMETRIUS

(making an elaborate pretext of "happening to pass by")

What sultry speech may sultry air beget?

(ELYSSE starts as if she'd been overheard, makes as if to go inside.)

May, lady, you've no cause to make for your shutters again.

It isn't the lover, it's only the neighbor.

ELYSSE

(shortly)

Oh. Yes, well, good evening to you, then.

DEMETRIUS

Now there's a greeting as little remarkable for being civil as the lady for being fair is much remarked.

ELYSSE

It's as fair a word as he merits who conspires with my tormentor to destroy my peace.

DEMETRIUS

Will the lady speak more plain?

ELYSSE

Oh, and have I set the courtier's poor brain a-whirl? Yes, the lady will speak more plain. The lady will put the courtier in mind that his great friend is her great foe; and it is no very remarkable thing that warm dislike should be felt by Elysse toward - the adviser, possibly, the abettor certainly - of Ronald.

DEMETRIUS

I had no thought therein but for your good.

ELYSSE

Who breaks my peace has not my good at heart.

DEMETRIUS

Or may I say, the good of both my friends?

ELYSSE

No, sir, you may not say so. And were you truly that friend you paint yourself, you would not exert yourself in a courtship on the one hand vexatious, on the other, without hope.

DEMETRIUS

Well, ma'am, there you speak a hard word, and I won't pretend I'm not sorry to hear it. "Hopeless" is a poor dish to set before famishing constancy.

(an ironic snort from ELYSSE)

Oh, now come, lady; though you love him not, yet, that he is the constantest of lovers - nay, the single-mindedest of men - you

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well
^
may not dispute it. Show me where time has produced such another
pattern of holding-fast. Nay, madam, a person, as I have heard it
said, a person deserves his credit.

(ELYSSE starts.)

Surely, the lady's dispositions are the lady's business, but I
should be much surprised if her lover's speeches, albeit they
set no fires in her heart, did not at least give pleasure to the
ear and matter for her reflection.

ELYSSE

(starts again, then recovers)

No pleasure; no matter.

DEMETRIUS

Is that a fact? Well, aren't ladies strange! Now mine, mine's
a susceptible heart. I don't know what I mightn't do if words
were addressed to me like, Flowers are opening upon the night:
Open thou, too: the rose!

ELYSSE

(really startled)

I'm hearing it again ... !

DEMETRIUS

There'd be no telling how I'd be taken. But that could come from
my being so susceptible.

ELYSSE

These words, that voice ... !

DEMETRIUS

Ronald's words, lady.

ELYSSE

Where is all the familiarity from?

DEMETRIUS

And Ronald's voice. Familiar, lady? Heard in the clatter of some passionate dream, perhaps?

ELYSSE

You just make one more insinuation like that and I leave.

(half to herself)

I can't think what's keeping me here as it is.

(makes as if to leave)

DEMETRIUS

Stay, lady, you can stay: I don't speak another word of the sufferer. It was scant courtliness in me to bicker with a lady, but even apart from that, I couldn't just now be less disposed to quarrel. I've just made myself an acquisition

(starts toward alley)

- oh, not some scrap of silver or townish bauble, no, but this fine great breathing thing here, sleek and slick as a table top,

(leads out the rather reluctant RONALD)

a-quiver with good blood and pure - or pure in such degree as befits the animal nature.

(pats the embarrassed COW)

ELYSSE

I should never have conjectured these rural enthusiasms in the elegant Lord Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS

What you mean is, you're a bit buffed to see me driving a cow down Scourtier's Way here, isn't that it?

ELYSSE

Surely I ...

DEMETRIUS

But you want to be careful the court breezes don't blow your topsoil off; you don't want to get too far from your estate and all it's been to you. We aristocrats, we're fay enough now, but we come out of the landscape to a man, and the ones who say they don't care to be with our animals, they forget the island character of one's estate and the bespattering one risks stepping off. I'm not talking so much about myself; my father was a butcher before he bred. But red dirt! Streams! Land! Hold them steady against your mind, caress them if they show signs of trembling, yourself draw a cow down Courtier's Way, so's to fix them there.

(sheepishly)

But also, I had a little difficulty finding a servant to handle this particular cow.

ELYSSE

Might one inquire why so?

DEMETRIUS

Lady, as for that, inquiries may be made. And if you push an inquiry far enough, you find a human weakness at the end of it. The weakness here? What it actually was, was - oh, laziness, I should think. What won't a servant say to be off work.

ELYSSE

But what they actually did say ... ?

DEMETRIUS

Oh, what did they not! I get the most extraordinary song-and-dance.

ELYSSE

Yes, but this time ?

DEMETRIUS

Oh, even cruder than usual. One's a little offended, you know, to be thought not worth the trouble of a better story.

ELYSSE

But still, I should like -

DEMETRIUS

Oh, it couldn't be sillier, and I'm very careful about boring ladies.

(to COW)

Come on, girlie, come on, dear.

(vague muffled moo from COW)

ELYSSE

I should be -

DEMETRIUS

(catching her up)

Yes?

ELYSSE

(catching herself)

I should be fairly curious to hear.

DEMETRIUS

Should you? Isn't it funny the way you've hardly patience to hear out one of Ronald's lovely speeches, and then, such an avidity for the stable chatter.

(The COW makes emphatic gestures to DEMETRIUS that he should get on with the story. To COW:)

That'll be enough now, girl; hold it there.

(to ELYSSE)

I don't know, it's something about their not being satisfied with where I got it.

ELYSSE

Oh, well, of course, if you've gone and got yourself involved in some swindle -

DEMETRIUS

Yes, all right, then, in that case; but there's been nothing like that. I got the cow off this transparently inoffensive old woman.-

ELYSSE

Old woman?

DEMETRIUS

Yes.

ELYSSE

Which old woman?

DEMETRIUS

Oh, some Goody . . . Shuffleboard or Peppermill, some such name...

ELYSSE

(faintly)

Rippleswitch?

DEMETRIUS

Oh, yes, that's it, Rippleswitch. You know her?

ELYSSE

Well, I've ... heard some things.

DEMETRIUS

Perhaps you'll corroborate me then: Would you say I'm right in my impression of her as a sweet, harmless old soul, and though of course undoubtedly shaken by her child's misfortunes -

ELYSSE

Her child?

DEMETRIUS

- still, the last person you'd expect a rumor like this to get started about.

ELYSSE

What's this now about a rumor? I thought your servants -

DEMETRIUS

Wasn't it devilish of them, though! They didn't have to invent a thing, because they had this awful rumor lying to hand -

ELYSSE

(trying to master herself)

Demetrius, I'm going to have to ask you... Would you mind telling me what this rumor was?

DEMETRIUS

Yes, Elysse, I would mind. I'm not going to be the one to spread that woman's bad fame one person further than it has to go.

ELYSSE

I assure you -

DEMETRIUS

No, Elysse, no, absolutely; it's uncourtly to refuse, but refusal is a courtesy when compliance is a slander. No, Elysse; I should do badly to answer and you do not do well to ask.

ELYSSE

(giving it up, in impatience)

Oh, all right, then.

(frantic gestures from COW. DEMETRIUS quiets it.)

DEMETRIUS

Particularly when you consider, it's not even her the story's

really about; but just by virtue of her happening to be the girl's mother -

ELYSSE

The girl! Now Demetrius, I have to have this out, and at once.

DEMETRIUS

Courtesy forbids -

ELYSSE

No, courtesy demands!

(improvising)

I'm a curious lady; it's a whim. Don't courtiers have to respect a lady's whim? And then, don't you see, Demetrius, it's just because I'm only having my whim that you run no danger. I mean, I'm not likely to make a fool of myself by passing gossip a child wouldn't credit, am I?

DEMETRIUS

Well, then, in the confidence you'll have your laugh and then not give it another thought, here you are:

(COW gives a violent, but muffled moo.
DEMETRIUS turns to it.)

Easy, girl, easy. Aren't you at all pleased to be having your story told?

ELYSSE

What!

DEMETRIUS

That's the joke, you see. But of course, you wouldn't see without knowing the story. Which now follows. Goody Rippleswitch had a daughter, Lisa, Lisa the fair, Lisa the flower, Lisa the toast of the country round. As she was known. This Lisa was loved, and well loved, by Reginald, a squire of birth and character.

Now Reginald, he woo'd and woo'd; but Lisa would have none of it. Rather like you and Ron, actually, in that respect.

(Here his tone becomes - and remains during the rest of this narration - mock-portentous.)

So take care, for here's the end of a terrible tale. The more Reginald pressed his suit - and he loved the lass well and truly - the colder Lisa grew. He spoke words to fire the heart of any generous girl, and then he muttered threats of a terrible revenge if thwarted; but whether he woo'd or whether he cursed, it was all the same to haughty Lisa: she laughed in his face. Well, it's a pity but a fact that the better you love, the worse you hate if that love's thwarted. And Reginald, I'm sure you'll agree, had been thwarted past endurance, so - oh, the next you're not going to make me, it's so silly -

(giggles)

EIYSSSE

Go on.

DEMETRIUS

Well - only don't be like Lisa and laugh in my face. I'm only bearing the tale, remember.

Well, then, Reginald, scorned and woeful Reginald, acquires the services of a sorcerer, and the two of them contrive a terrible revenge. "Only first," says Reginald, in whom love still holds the ascendancy, "I mean to give her one last chance." So that night they pay her a visit, the lover drifting beneath the balcony, the wizard keeping to the shadows. "Lisa," cries the poor young man, "the stars bear me witness, I've borne you a true love, and if we've not closed upon it, again all stars to witness, that your whim and not my wish has been the stumbling-block. But however that may be, I mean now to bring this business to an issue: once more

I ask for your hand and, for what this may be worth to you, I never mean to ask it again." But the girl just laughed and laughed, and Reginald, feeling the laughter as a kind of fire, made signals to the enchanter in the shadows, who right away began to fiddle with his incense and bone. "All right, then!" shrieked the youth, "as you would not taste my love, taste my fury. As you would not give your animal feelings the rein, henceforth be completely at their disposal." The magus clapped his hands, there was some light, some shaking, and where a moment before a girl had stood, now there stands a sparkling ^{Guernsey} ~~Guernsey~~ cow. But what gives the tale a tang - at least I think so; what do you think? - is, there's nothing to say this cow here couldn't be the very one. Old Rippleswitch wasn't much in a dairy way. Of cows she never had but two or three. So the odds are good, and what makes them better is that poor Ripple never could bear the sight of her vachified offspring and was always trying to find someone ignorant ^{enough} ~~enough~~ to foist it off on. Now it wasn't till after the purchase that I heard the story for the first time.

(to COW, as if talking to a person)

So it distinctly is a possibility, isn't it?

(then changing his manner to baby-talk)

Isn't it? Isn't it? Yes. Yes. Yes. Oh, what an old star-crossed thing it is!

(The COW shakes violently, as if agitated. It then gives out three "moo's", unlike the noises it has made before in that the word "moo" is distinctly articulated by a human voice.)

ELYSSE

God in Heaven, what was that?

DEMETRIUS

(rubbing COW's shoulders and flanks)

Oh, poor Cow's cold, oh it's cold, shiver, shiver, shiver.

(under his breath, an imperative reminder)

Shiver!

(COW shivers with particular violence.)

ELYSSE

(half to herself)

In the cold of her own heart, shivering there...

DEMETRIUS

Ha, that's right Elysse, you've got the story straight, aren't you the quick one, Elysse! Though perhaps it's not all that kind of you to joke at the poor girl's expense - or the poor Cow's expense.

(to COW)

Come on, poor chilly old Cow, to stalls with thee.

ELYSSE

No - stay a moment.

DEMETRIUS

And let my purebred love here perish in the cold?

(to COW)

Come on, Lisa; there's fire ahead.

ELYSSE

LISA?

DEMETRIUS

Well, I had to call her something. And I thought, she may as well have the name they give her in all these interesting stories.

ELYSSE

Give her?

DEMETRIUS

Well, as you might say, give her. What with all the probability.

(to COW)

Come on, dear heart.

(He starts to lead her off. With a creak, the tear-gauzes roll out of the COW's eyes. ELYSSE horrified. DEMETRIUS goes on over his shoulder in a mock-portentous tone.)

So anyhow, I hope that's a lesson learned, Miss Severity.

Somebody goes and puts Ronald on to that Sorcerer - well, ^{that'd} be the end of the line for you, won't it? _^

ELYSSE

LOOK!

DEMETRIUS

Hm? What?

ELYSSE

The cow! Its eyes! Her eyes!

(The gauzes are now unfurled. DEMETRIUS takes a look, doesn't react.)

DEMETRIUS

Well?

ELYSSE

She weeps!

DEMETRIUS

Oh, weeping for the lost lover, is it? 'Pon my soul, lady, you're a hard lady with a hard wit. But if Liss does weep, you take the lesson home! Ronny's quite a single-minded boy, as you'd be the first to admit.

ELYSSE

She's crying hot tears!

DEMETRIUS

Yes, well, if I were you, lady, I'd be giving less thought to her weeping and more thought to what she might be weeping about, if weep she could.

ELYSSE

If weep she could!

DEMETRIUS

Of course, I'm only speaking for myself. It's hard for us men to get inside a lady's mind.

ELYSSE

Just look at her eyes!

DEMETRIUS

Hm. She does seem to be sweating around the forehead a little.

ELYSSE

Weren't you just saying what a cold night it was?

DEMETRIUS

Well, cold sweat, then. Sweat of fear, maybe.

ELYSSE

How can you say she's sweating when she was just shivering?

DEMETRIUS

Right! How about that? Hot one minute, cold the next. This had better be looked into!

ELYSSE

But Demetrius ... but ...

DEMETRIUS

Yes, this had better be looked into right away. I may have gone and got myself stuck with one very sick cow!

(Exit DEMETRIUS and the COW. Just as they get offstage, the COW gives one more very human, very miserable "moo". ELYSSE goes pale and grips the railing.)

Scene VI

(ELYSSE in a state, can't think what to do. Then, having an idea, she calls:)

ELYSSE

Lucinda. Lucinda? LUCINDA!

(She runs in through the balcony doors and can be heard charging down the stairs of her house, still calling. She bursts out of her door, dashes across the stage to LUCINDA's house, and bangs on the door and calls for LUCINDA.)

Enter LUCINDA, very out of spirits, from the other side of the stage; she sees what ELYSSE is doing, stares at her, sizes up - or thinks she sizes up - the situation, then crosses to her compassionately.)

LUCINDA

Oh, dear - at your end, too?

ELYSSE

Thank goodness for you! Things shake me and shake me. I've just had an experience and I'm still shaking.

LUCINDA

At Leone's, too? Has the state nothing better to offer than the church in this respect?

ELYSSE

I beg pardon?

LUCINDA

You know what our trouble was, don't you? Not keeping together. I went off to the pastor, and you very kindly agreed to query the palace. But women on their own just throw the gates open.

ELYSSE

I don't think you understand; I've just had this terrible experience.

LUCINDA

Yes, now you tell me about it. And I want you to know, I'll feel, I'll be right there feeling for you, because I've been with this brute of a pastor, I know.

ELYSSE

Yes, I'm sure you do, I'm sure you know, but -

LUCINDA

But wait, before you get started, just listen to this and then tell me if you think I'm exaggerating. He might have just said, "No". He knows that cellar the way I know my chiffonier, and if he didn't have a trap, all he had to do was say so, but no, he sends the boy down anyway - and why? Because he has some questions, has the old pastor, some remarks and some questions.

ELYSSE

Please let me talk to you, Lucinda. I'm frightened.

LUCINDA

But on the other hand, it serves no purpose being frightened. Now, take me. Was I frightened when the old fool says, "My dear," he says, this smooth old pastor, "how well I understand," he says, and he understanding nothing, "that a young woman sometimes needs an emblem to keep her in mind". And I said, "In mind, sir?" And he says, "I know the effort it takes to keep the animal nature down" - to me he said that! "Not that with me," he goes on, "it's that particular temptation, no. With me, it's extravagance; so I keep a little sieve on the night-table. Sieves for the spenders, traps for the passionate," was his genteel little conclusion.

to me. Can you imagine that, can you really get any grip on it with your imagination? But frightened? I could have rumped his chalky mouth a little, that's the extent I was frightened. Revolted, anything you like - but not frightened.

ELYSSE

No, I'm sure you weren't. I was, and it was because -

LUCINDA

Oh, and then, the boy comes back and says he's sorry, but he can't seem to put his finger on the trap anywhere, and at that the priest just went crimson. That part I didn't understand ...

Oh, but dear, I'm sorry, you were going to tell me about Leone's.

ELYSSE

I don't want to talk about Leone's!

LUCINDA

No, of course, you don't want to, but I rather think you'd better, don't you think?

ELYSSE

(impatient)

Oh, they had an impertinent question for me, too: was traps the only way I could keep Ronald. Oh, Ronald! Oh!

(bursts into tears)

LUCINDA

Yes, just that sort of question. True to form. But I'm afraid I fail to see -

ELYSSE

Dearest, what you're failing to see is, I'm upset in quite another direction. Demetrius -

LUCINDA

Ah, the husband! What have you been having to take from him recently?

ELYSSE

Something he brought along. Something to show me. I mean, it must have been to show me, or why did he have it along?

LUCINDA

Has my husband been making you presents?

ELYSSE

(slightly hysterical)

Oh, I wouldn't call it a present, Lucinda. No, you know, after really careful consideration I wouldn't call it a present at all.

LUCINDA

All right, now, what did he do?

ELYSSE

Oh, nothing so much, nothing all that very much. Bought a cow.

LUCINDA

How's that?

ELYSSE

Just - to hear him tell it - just happened to go and buy a cow. Just up and bought it, just happened to be leading it along.

LUCINDA

My husband is a trumpeter of Leone's guard!

ELYSSE

And so he wouldn't be on the streets with a cow - is that what you're saying? But that's not his idea of it, you know. He points to your usual city-noble: the way he's off his land all the time, in separation from his stock...

LUCINDA

Well, as I told you, dear - think calmly back and you'll remember - he is quite hooked on the subject of animals. Gets it from his father, I should think - who, incidentally, was no city-noble or any other kind of noble. Ach, there's nothing in it! What would he want with a cow, anyway? It's the city here.

ELYSSE

That's it. There was no cow.

LUCINDA

Well, I rather did suspect and say there wouldn't be. Now suppose you -

ELYSSE

There was a girl.

LUCINDA

Another girl! Was it you or this other one he was after? And don't, please, hesitate to be frank, you really mustn't, because there's not a chance in the world of hurting me and I specially want to know. There's more than one sort of trap to our purpose.

ELYSSE

Or actually, there wasn't either a girl or a cow.

(deliberately, to herself, as if fixing it in her own mind)

No girl. And no cow.

(movement of impatience from LUCINDA)

But a cow once a girl. Or a girl now a cow - I haven't come near finding the right way to think of it. Why don't we say, a girl turned cow.

LUCINDA

Was that Demetrius' little formulation?

ELYSSE

Well, he bought it from old Rippleswitch, and already one had heard rumors there; and now out comes this whole story, and I can't sit still worrying.

LUCINDA

It is a little upsetting...

ELYSSE

A little upsetting! Do you know why that girl was changed? For being unreceptive to her lover. And do you know who had her changed? The lover.

LUCINDA

That's certainly the first person who comes to mind. How sad for her.

ELYSSE

And what is it for me? Demetrius tells Ronald - which he's sure to - , Ronald gets hold of the sorcerer, and then it's only a matter of time before I'm munching daisies.

LUCINDA

And then Demetrius will have two cows to march past the windows of distracted young ladies.

ELYSSE

That's comforting!

LUCINDA

Oh, now, really, Elysse, if you just stop and think a minute, can't you see what the idea was - to frighten you into Ronald's arms?

ELYSSE

Never mind Ronald, you have this cow!

LUCINDA

I suspect, you know, it was rather an ordinary cow.

ELYSSE

That's because you didn't see it weep or hear it speak.

LUCINDA

And what did it have to say?

ELYSSE

(imitating the COW's deliberate human inflection)

"Moo."

LUCINDA

That's what they usually have to say.

ELYSSE

But it spoke its moo, and it wept, and - oh, what do I have to say to make an impression on you?

LUCINDA

To convince me that Ronald plans hexing you? Sorry, I can't go for it.

ELYSSE

It'll be the first thing that comes into his mind!

LUCINDA

Yes, but the second thing that comes into his mind will be our story. I don't say he won't feel like being revenged, but the story'll rein him, because the story keeps him from laying your coldness to inclination. So unless he's one of that unreasonable sort -

ELYSSE

About the story - I'm not pinning my hopes too high there.

LUCINDA

80

(a little plaintively)

You said it was a very good story.

ELYSSE

I still think so. Only ... I haven't told it.

LUCINDA

That puts a new complexion on things! What's been keeping you, for heavens' sakes?

ELYSSE

I just mean, I don't happen to have told him yet. Of course, I will; it's just, I couldn't - you know what I mean? - couldn't exactly burst out with it ...

(seizing something tangible)

And also, I haven't actually seen him since then.

LUCINDA

(looks off)

Well, you'll see him in a minute. There he is.

ELYSSE

(looking off)

And Demetrius with him, telling him the whole story, you can see!

LUCINDA

You'd better get to him fast with your story, while that sweet mouth is still good for something beside grazing. I'm certain the story will hold him - if you can just get it out in time. Meanwhile, I'm going after Sirwith; you remember what I told you about him?

ELYSSE

The funny old man? What do we need him for?

LUCINDA

An emergency measure. He knows animals and he knows spells.

ELYSSE

But I mean, what's he got to do with -

LUCINDA

In case we have to engage on that level. But I'll bring him; you'll see.

(Exit LUCINDA. ELYSSE retires into the alley. Enter RONALD and DEMETRIUS, deep in conversation, pretending not to see ELYSSE, but speaking very much for her benefit.)

DEMETRIUS

- and though she'd been taking on something fearful all the way through, when I came to the part about why the girl had been encowed -

RONALD

How very, as you say, extraordinary, that poor Elysse should take on so.

DEMETRIUS

But shall I tell you what I think? I think - now promise not to laugh - but I think Miss Elysse was just a bit taken in the conscience, and the effect of that was, she grew a lit-tle edgy.

RONALD

You say, "edgy"?

DEMETRIUS

Well, in that she'd no better grounds for her coldness than the unfortunate Rippleswitch.

RONALD

Nor has she.

(ELYSSE's face falls.)

DEMETRIUS

So, then, assuming you to be a certain sort of lover -

RONALD

Demetrius, I stop you there. Nothing, no passion or face of circumstance, no impatience, no reason or want of reason, nothing could ever compel me to deal with Elysse that way. It's not only beyond what I'm able to do, I can't even imagine it.

(ELYSSE brightens.)

Or, it's not so much I can't imagine it, but I'm sure it won't come to that.

(ELYSSE's face falls again. RONALD advances to ELYSSE's window.)

Help me get her attention. It's cruel to leave the poor girl in a sweat about this.

(ELYSSE brightens again.)

Also, I'm curious to see what side-effects may have been produced in the way of pliancy.

(ELYSSE's face falls again, but she gathers her powers and comes forward.)

ELYSSE

(addressing DEMETRIUS)

It may have made you wonder, sir, that I was just now so moved by a certain circumstance you imparted.

DEMETRIUS

Why, madam, as for that, I may have cut a bit close to the bone.

ELYSSE

Ay, close; and closer than you have any means of knowing.

RONALD

Now surely my dear Elysse (whose presence I am now for the first time in six weeks beholding), surely my kind Elysse (whose spurnings had nearly put me out of mind to come at all tonight), surely my hard but fair Elysse, my cold but dear Elysse, my capricious but well-belov'd Elysse, could never believe her Ronald to be toying with the idea of an unspeakable, highly satisfying revenge.

ELYSSE

Sir, I don't believe you capable of punishing where fault is none, nor of raining ruin upon the unoffending.

DEMETRIUS

Well, you know, Elysse, there is such a thing as making an effort.

ELYSSE

And there is such a thing as being destroyed, for upon such an effort, destruction would follow - as surely upon him, as on me, who wrought me to it.

(to RONALD)

Therefore I do you a kindness, sir, where I may seem least kind. But of my true kindness and seeming cruelty you are alike ignorant, being ignorant of what I now relate:

RONALD

(puzzled)

Really, Elysse, don't feel you have to excuse -

ELYSSE

Excuse! Sir, there is little here in need of excusing. To a mere disinclination no guilt attaches, but I am likewise guiltless of that cold inconsideration with which you charge me - and guiltless in a degree you cannot well imagine.

(to DEMETRIUS)

Know, Demetrius, that the uneasiness which your tale of animal-change produced in me was no flutter of conscience. Not fear of having merited, but remembrance of having shared that fate, drove the blood from my cheeks. To speak plainly, though I am human, I have been otherwise; and though a woman, I have been a brute.

RONALD and DEMETRIUS

R. Been what? D. What's this, now?

ELYSSE

The girl before you never had parents or a childhood, never knew thoughts in a human mind or looked out from behind a human face, until her eighteenth year.

RONALD

But what then?

ELYSSE

Here is strangest of all. It was not as a bitch or a mare or a milch-cow that I began my days, no; but a roaring, red-seeing bull is what I was. A bull inclined to break corral and peer longingly into a lighted window. A bull who, as he mated, charged, fought, took all his typical pleasures, knew that this was somehow amiss, this was running against a nature not yet his, but his rightly. And I once put put my horns into a man: I've never known a pleasure like that moment, but as the bone tore through, the agony was in my belly.

At this time the magus Pentipater fled cities and came down into the farm-country. Now I had often had the sense of being in on a man's thoughts, but here was a man, moving, I was sure, freely

in and about my own. Ask, how could I tell, and you've got me - but I must have been right. For one night under the moon, Pentipater, with his green robe hanging about him like a mist, rested his hands upon my corral, and spoke: "Sleek bull, I know the discontents of your mind, and congratulate you upon the justice of your wishes: so few men aspire to humanity, there ^{surely} is room for an interloping aspiration. Everywhere I look I see hearts set on being brutalized, leaving such a balance to redress! My power to that purpose! Sleek bull, I give you the humanity you pine after more warmly than they who should better know its worth."

DEMETRIUS

One's supposed to believe that?

ELYSSE

Sir, if you do not, I am lost surely. For to his blessing, the magus affixed a condition: that if, having once been let out of the animal nature, I ever again gave myself over to it - even so much as to love - it would be right back into the bull with me.

(to RONALD)

And this fate any partner in any love of mine would share. Now surely, I must be a little more comprehensible, Ronald. You must see how I've been preserving where most I seemed to cast down.

DEMETRIUS

From a great bull Pentipater has fashioned a frail girl, and I wonder how from the frailty he would compose the bull again.

ELYSSE

Now there you strike the wisdom of Pentipater's design. "I should be doing an injustice," he went on, "if the creature on whom I enjoined such conditions had still a bull's nature to contend with.

Therefore I render you a slight girl, to whose hand the means of gratifying a fatal desire will never lie too easy."

(to RONALD)

And it's that girl, Ronald, you thought to woo, never dreaming what grief might attend on the winning. But now I've explained it, it must be clear to you why you have to get away and stay away.

RONALD

By heaven, no!

ELYSSE

Ah, what does it take to move you? Is my ruin nothing to you, nor your own peril? Where do I go after I have appealed there?

RONALD

And love as the lovers have known it - this would be animal nature to your wizard?

ELYSSE

That was his opinion, and an opinion, I confess, to which my own experience inclines me. But what of that? Opinions are nothing here.

RONALD

True. The situation is upon us.

ELYSSE

(hopefully)

You do see that?

RONALD

Regretfully, I do.

ELYSSE

Then you will go away?

RONALD

I shall do what is left.

ELYSSE

That is, go away?

RONALD

No: save you.

ELYSSE

My safety lies in your departure!

RONALD

Lies elsewhere.

ELYSSE

There solely and most sure!

RONALD

That's wrong, though! When you dismiss the lover, is that putting love away?

ELYSSE

Love is the danger.

RONALD

That, love is never! Your danger is the magus Pentipater. whilst he holds his condition, and your beauty holds, you are in peril continual. Demetrius, courtier and friend, what is our course here?

DEMETRIUS

But can there be any question? We find the wizard, force that compeller to strike his condition, and then join the lovers!

ELYSSE

(plainly unprepared for this)

Oh, now wait a minute - !

DEMETRIUS

(seeing she is at a loss and taking her up quickly)

Yes?

ELYSSE

You can't just walk up to Pentipater -

RONALD

To win Elysse, there's something I can't do? - and nothing more to it than this? Oh, darling, why couldn't these trials have been starting months ago?

ELYSSE

But I don't want you to think it was only -

RONALD

We could have been having our happiness! - and all I had to do was talk to a wizard or something!

ELYSSE

You mustn't go to Pentipater, nothing like that! My gratitude -

DEMETRIUS

Gratitude to a man who gave life to withhold joy?

ELYSSE

But -

RONALD

Who raised you from animal contents only to set you among human woes?

ELYSSE

That could be; only -

RONALD

Talk to me of gratitude!

(dropping to a lower, intenser tone)

Only tell me this one thing, Elysse: do I have your favor here?

ELYSSE

(petulant at the way the whole thing is backfiring)

Oh, I don't know.

RONALD

No, but say it. Bring yourself to.

ELYSSE

I'm telling you, I -

RONALD

Say it!

(He takes ELYSSE and kisses her more violently than the whole tone of the play hitherto would have suggested. She struggles, yields, then panics and breaks from him.)

ELYSSE

(in a scared, awed voice)

I hope you haven't gone and done it.

RONALD

Now I shall go and do it! Now what is beyond my strength to do?

ELYSSE

No, I meant -

DEMETRIUS

(to RONALD)

Maybe first we ought to have a word with Sirwith.

RONALD

That's a point.

ELYSSE

Who is this Sirwith I keep hearing about?

DEMETRIUS

An emergency measure.

RONALD

(to ELYSSE)

For now, farewell: when next we meet, you are wholly human; or, what is the same thing, wholly at liberty to love.

DEMETRIUS

(to ELYSSE)

What do you mean, you keep hearing about him?

RONALD

Come on!

(He practically drags DEMETRIUS off.)

Scene VII

(Enter LUCINDA with SIRWITH. SIRWITH carries a bull-suit draped over his arm, and smiles professionally.)

LUCINDA

Here I am back with Sirwith - to no purpose, let us hope.

ELYSSE

I don't see the use of this old gentleman, but something's going to have to be done.

LUCINDA

You couldn't get Ronald to believe you?

ELYSSE

Oh, he was believing me all over the place.

LUCINDA

Then how can it not be clear to him what he has to do? What does he think he has left to do.

ELYSSE

Something we neither of us thought of, but something quite typical of Ronald.

LUCINDA

You mean, love you to your destruction?

ELYSSE

Oh, but he's figured a way round the destruction. His idea is, find the wizard, and get him to raise my condition.

(SIRWITH begins to smooth down and arrange the bull suit, as if for a fitting.)

LUCINDA

And how does he think he's going to finesse that?

ELYSSE

Well, he's going to say something like, "Pentipater, why did you want to go and give life and keep back the joy in living? Was that a kindness, Wizard, you who thought to dispose kindly?" I think, you know, it's rather a good argument.

LUCINDA

Hm! As if the wizard were likely to be impressed with sentiment like that!

ELYSSE

Dear, I think you're forgetting - there isn't any.

LUCINDA

Any what?

ELYSSE

Any wizard.

LUCINDA

Well, so there isn't. And if he can't persuade, this lover of yours - and it's my personal opinion he can't - then I suppose he'll be thinking about how he's going to compel. And how is he going to compel?

ELYSSE

He said something about getting hold of Sirwith...

LUCINDA

Well, then,

(to SIRWITH)

aren't we lucky to have got hold of you first, old friend?

(SIRWITH nods self-disparagingly)

So by the time Ronald and Demetrius - I suppose Demetrius was along?

(ELYSSE nods.)

Yes, I'd supposed so. By the time they've given up on their wizard - incidentally, where on earth did they propose to start looking?

ELYSSE

(struck by this)

Isn't that funny, they never even asked me!

LUCINDA

No. Well, wherever; by the time they've given their search up, Sirwith will have done our business. Won't you have, old friend?

(nod of polite disclaimer from SIRWITH)

All right, lets get going. Wow, love, look what we've got for you. Show, Sirwith.

(With a flourish in the manner of a cloak-and-suit man, SIRWITH holds out the bullsuit, which is in rather a crushed condition.)

ELYSSE

My god, what's that?

LUCINDA

(to SIRWITH)

Isn't she precious?

(to ELYSSE)

That's the emergency measure.

ELYSSE

(shrugging)

Don't see it.

LUCINDA

Since Ronald's not to be put off, the suit must be put on. Though the possibility of ruin didn't move him, the fact of it must.

ELYSSE

I'm supposed to wear that?

LUCINDA

So we can say to him, "Look here, Ronald: you've been confident, and you've persisted, and it's happened."

ELYSSE

Darling, I know you're a very clever woman, but this will not go! There's difficulty after difficulty! It's so silly-looking.

LUCINDA

Well, that it is, but couldn't you make an effort to feel like

a costume ball? Then you would have it easier. You know, now I think of it, there was a costume ball recently where you had to come as an animal, and people just outdid themselves. Everybody except Demetrius. His idea was, to come in dinner clothes - the human animal, he said. That was his idea of a superior joke. All right. But the next costume affair he shows up in his tux jacket again: all right, what was it this time? people wanted to know. Why, it was the Emperor's New Clothes, couldn't they see? A very ironical man, my husband: Sniggers and keeps his own counsel.

But anyhow, get into your bull-suit.

(SIRWITH begins to help ELYSSE on with the suit.)

ELYSSE

It's not going to go over the skirt.

(SIRWITH gestures, as if to say, "Allow me."
He then drops the suit over ELYSSE so that it covers her back but is open in front with the leg-pieces hanging down at her sides.)

LUCINDA

(a little surprised in spite of herself)

You know, that's not so bad looking. A little brocade shows, but the fit -

(feels the skin of the costume)

Luscious!

ELYSSE

(SIRWITH is adjusting various details of the suit)

And another thing, why should it have happened just now?

LUCINDA

(thinks a moment)

Did he try to kiss you or anything?

ELYSSE

(softly)

He kissed me...

LUCINDA

We'll say the kiss did it.

ELYSSE

Yes, but Lucinda, you keep using expressions like, "something 'did it'" or, "it's 'happened'", but how do you get round the fact that nothing did do it, nothing has happened, and I'm still the young woman I always was?

(SERWITH lowers the headpiece of the bull-suit over ELYSSE's head.)

You don't expect I'm going to pass the rest of my days in this outfit?

(SERWITH vigorously pulling some knots tight.)

And what's Ronald going to think the next time he sees me out of it?

LUCINDA

(airily)

Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about that part of it. We'll tell him - oh, we can say, this time you were only transformed on a warning and the enchanter let you go back; but any more trouble and you finish your days in the pasture. Something in that vein - you know, heart-catching.

(muffled sound from ELYSSE)

You don't want to try and talk any more while you've got that on, dear, it's very indistinct. We'll just move you inside and you can concentrate on being ready.

(ELYSSE paws vaguely.)

Having trouble, dear? All right, hold on, I'll take the reins.

(LUCINDA leads ELYSSE, still pawing vaguely, toward LUCINDA's house. One random movement of ELYSSE's catches LUCINDA like a blow; LUCINDA is startled. She opens the door and deposits ELYSSE inside; then, remembering SIRWITH, addresses him carelessly over her shoulder.)

I don't think we'll be needing you anymore, Sirwith, we've got the benefit.

(SIRWITH smiles and bows deferentially to - as LUCINDA is not paying any attention to him - nobody in particular, and saunters off.)

Scene VIII

(DEMETRIUS runs in, out of breath)

LUCINDA

(seeing DEMETRIUS and going into an elaborate lament for his benefit)

Oh, that poor, lovely girl! Lost utterly! It's said love brings out the beast in one, but could it ever really have been said till now?

DEMETRIUS

Has he passed here?

LUCINDA

That devil! When he knew, when he knew!

(pretending just to have noticed DEMETRIUS)

Has who passed here?

DEMETRIUS

Who? Ronald!

LUCINDA

That devil!

DEMETRIUS

The poor boy!

LUCINDA

The poor boy? When he knew? When he knew? The poor girl!

DEMETRIUS

Who?

LUCINDA

Who? Elysse!

DEMETRIUS

That devil!

LUCINDA

You say so?

DEMETRIUS

I say, among lots of other things I'm going to have to say, that maybe it's time you stopped applauding cruelty and snubbing devotion. Elysse touches you and touches you, but would you have any reaction at all, I wonder, to the sight startled families looking up from their dinners have had of Ronald tearing around the city after Pentipater; or, with no leads forthcoming there, after Sirwith.

LUCINDA

Whereas there wouldn't, in your opinion, be all that much troubling Elysse?

DEMETRIUS

Well, I'm not denying she has a problem, but look, everybody's applying themselves to hers. As soon as Ronald puts his finger on Sirwith -

LUCINDA

What do you say is going to happen then?

DEMETRIUS

Well, as you know - and I think you know why, too - I have the

greatest confidence in Sirwith.

LUCINDA

So that?

DEMETRIUS

So that I would say, from the moment Ron finds him to the moment she gets her freedom, is just a question of time.

LUCINDA

Oh, really? Is that your opinion? All right, now you tell your meddling friend - and you come here and see for your meddling self - that it's gone and happened.

DEMETRIUS

What?

LUCINDA

What there was to happen, dummy - if it hasn't flown out of your mind what that was.

(A pounding on LUCINDA's door from within now begins and builds to a deafening crescendo under the following:)

You were going to send sorcerers about their business; build up love in hearts with other things on their minds, is what you were thinking to do - but here's what you did do.

(goes to her door, opens it, and stands aside)

Here's Elysse for you: by your folly and past your cure -
bull forever!

(The BULL bursts out of the door and pursues DEMETRIUS around the stage. The BULL is now represented by a muscular male dancer in a form-fitting, stylized costume. ELYSSE's dress, which showed through her bull-costume, is of course no longer visible.)

DEMETRIUS

(as he is being pursued)

This is Elysse chasing me?

(to BULL)

You're Elysse?

(BULL answers by renewing its attack.)

You want me to think of you as Elysse, you stop chasing me.

Elysse would not have chased, no; Elysse had an appreciation of what was being done for her. All right, maybe things have got snarled up a little, that's possible; but Elysse's reaction would be, " 's all right. How could you have known?"

LUCINDA

You could have known because you were told. You could have known because it's common knowledge what happens when the animal's out. And is the animal ever out!

(in the tone of a children's taunt)

The animal's out, the animal's out!

DEMETRIUS

Call it off, Lucinda, for heaven's sake; haven't you got any control?

LUCINDA

Some, Demetrius, and I'm going after more.

(to BULL, in a business-like tone)

All right, Elysse: Down! Off!

(BULL undecided for a moment, then draws back sullen and panting)

She does one's will for the moment - though each time it gets a little harder; and how much trust does one give the beast in any case? Not a good great deal, I shouldn't think: No, what you want there is traps. Iron they understand, they hup-to at the smash of the jaws - that's done your beast.

DEMETRIUS

All right, let's allow it happened; why should it have happened just now. He's been after her months now.

LUCINDA

One importunity too many, I guess.

DEMETRIUS

Oh, your idea of that!

LUCINDA

As, for example, would he have kissed her?

DEMETRIUS

He did give her a peck.

LUCINDA

There you are.

DEMETRIUS

He was going to fight for her. It was to seal his commission, as you might say. A ceremony.

LUCINDA

Mouths are coming down on mouths, and that's your word for it.

DEMETRIUS

I can assure you, that was his idea of it.

LUCINDA

Oh, your idea of his idea! Maybe so. But that made the difference. And you're not forgetting, I trust, that Pentipater's condition brings in the partner, too. Next look you take, he could be at the grass-bin.

DEMETRIUS

I can't give that much weight to a kiss.

LUCINDA

Oh, what you can give weight to! But it was the kiss. I know because she knew; she was heard to cry, "The kiss has brought the rain!" just as she was going under.

(pause)

DEMETRIUS

(in a low excited voice)

Lucinda.

LUCINDA

Um?

DEMETRIUS

What was it like?

LUCINDA

Was what like?

DEMETRIUS

What you call, "going under".

LUCINDA

You don't suppose I stayed around to look?

DEMETRIUS

Well, you heard the last words, you must have been there.

LUCINDA

There - but not looking. You don't seriously suppose I looked?

DEMETRIUS

You're going to tell me you were in on a moment like that and not curious?

LUCINDA

Curious! To see a person's humanity sink out of them and run along

the ruts of the street? I couldn't help hearing crashes, as voices rendered their doon, the tremor gathering beneath my shoes, but what I could do was screw up my eyes and screw my mind up too, I may say.

DEMETRIUS

I wonder things like, did she go an inco~~h~~ at a time or bang! there she was. Was there gradual alteration of the tissue, or was it limbs one moment, paws the next?

LUCINDA

Particulars like that might be obtainable from your friend Rippleswitch.

DEMETRIUS

(suddenly seeing his way clear)

Rippleswitch! There is the light missing! Maybe Elysse has gone back into the bull, but what does it matter? It couldn't matter less! No, because: For the men, women; for the rats, lady rats; and for the bulls, cows, Lucinda: bulls for the cows!

(as if provoked by the word "cows", the BULL begins to chase DEMETRIUS around the stage again.)

Oh, for Christ's sake, muzzle it! I'm guaranteeing something, can't you make it understand?

LUCINDA

It is a beast, and how should it understand?

DEMETRIUS

(to BULL - which still pursues her - confidentially)

But pretty bull, dear one, what if one had - just the thing? Does bull remember the nice something I showed her back the other shape?

(BULL gives a violent lurch, which could be interpreted as a nod.)

Then can bull figure in what sense everything is going to be all right for her?

LUCINDA

Will you give her back her shape again?

DEMETRIUS

(BULL still holding him at bay)

That is, have I been to school to Pennipit or Sirwith? That's not the way of it, mistress. Demetrius will be held only to what Demetrius has undertaken, and will not be pressed for details just yet.

LUCINDA

(looks at him suspiciously for a moment; then, in a tone of command to the BULL:)

That'll do, Elysse.

(BULL shows no signs of desisting.)

All right, stop it now! Off!

(BULL draws back, but more sullenly and reluctantly than last time, and still keeping tense.)

DEMETRIUS

And so, Demetrius may about his business - which is all Demetrius ever asks. Wife, bull, keep you here. Just wait.

(in another tone)

Just wait!

(He runs out, with a purpose in his eye.)

LUCINDA

(turns, the moment DEMETRIUS is out of earshot, to the BULL, which has not changed its position in the least.)

Well, that flurried some brain-pans, wouldn't you say? I don't see - do you see? - what's left them beyond a long remorse.

Oh, I know, you heard Demetrius sing a song about illumination,

but I wouldn't worry, I don't see it.

(looks carefully at BULL)

My, you've got that suit fitting a marvel. I don't see skirt anywhere. But if you'd like to make yourself comfortable - no, wait, on second thought, don't touch a thing: first we want to hear from Demetrius.

(The BULL has not given the least sign of "touching a thing" - has not yet, in fact, budged an inch. LUCINDA just now notices this.)

Oh, didn't I say? He's gone. Couldn't you tell? Oh, but I suppose you don't take in much through those slots you've got. Anyhow, it'd be perfectly safe to unbend a little; though as I say, I do think it'd be wise to stay in till we see where we're at exactly. I could undo the snaps if you'd like, dear.

(LUCINDA reaches out to take hold of the BULL's costume; the BULL rears furiously, startling LUCINDA.)

No, no, dear, it's Lucinda here.

(as if speaking to a deaf person)

Not Demetrius - Lucinda. Demetrius - gone.

(Confident that she has now made all clear, she reaches out again, and the BULL rears still more violently.)

You can if you want, dear; but when they aren't here, I don't see much reason. However, as pleases you.

(at first speaking to the BULL, but soon getting lost in her own thoughts)

It must be, this situation hasn't come home to Demetrius with any force.

(as if the following were really striking her for the first time:)

What a terrible thing it is, really, to have on your conscience: someone's loss of their human nature. We have this expression, "it's only human nature"; we minimize it, is what we do. "Only

human nature" - yes, but wait until you have to do without -
then ... ! Then what? I seem to be getting in over my head.

I don't know. Who would know? Miss Rippleswitch? That's certainly
 a possibility. Not to speak of the girl bull, here.

(to BULL, but without looking at it)

How about it, magpie? Any remarks from below the skin, any
 reactions? What's your verdict? What's the life like?

(She turns rather languidly toward the BULL -
 and is pulled up short. The BULL has worked itself
 into a frenzy and is about to charge her.)

Elysse!

(trying to hold the animal at bay)

Now, Elysse, now; a little more caution, please, when you're
 looking so real as this. You know, you're looking so real that -
 in a minute we'll be laughing together at this - that for a moment,
 despite myself -

OH, ELYSSE! HAS IT HAPPENED?

Scene IX

(DEMETRIUS appears at one side of the stage, tugging
 manfully at a taut rope, the other end of which is
 attached to the COW offstage. LUCINDA is still holding
 the BULL at bay.)

DEMETRIUS

(in the direction of the rope, but for LUCINDA's
 benefit)

Come on, Lisa, pretty baby girl; won't you come along now, dear heart;
 it's Pappy Demetrius here. Don't be scared; why be scared?
 Come on in!

LUCINDA

(catching sight of DEMETRIUS; in a whisper)

Now, Elysse, as ought to be clear even to that clouded intellect

of yours, Mr. Demetrius and I, Mrs. Lucinda Demetrius, want what you want. I am not going to pretend that I am perfectly in possession of my husband's intentions. No. But I can tell you what, indeed, I shouldn't have thought I'd have to, that everyone here is doing everything they can.

DEMETRIUS

(in a whisper to the COW, off)

Ronald, I'm telling you, you're completely accepted as a cow.

LUCINDA

(in a whisper to the BULL)

Glyase, if you're still making any pretense of a refusal, hold your character up, hold it up there!

DEMETRIUS

(in a whisper to COW, off)

I've got you everything, it only asks that you readjust a little.

LUCINDA

(in a whisper to the BULL)

Indignation will take us through whatever he's planned - only there must be union, I can't work the indignation from any other basis.

DEMETRIUS

(in a whisper to COW, off)

If you trust me, you'll like what you get, I promise you.

LUCINDA

(in a whisper, to BULL)

Wronged girl, protectress - that's how it must be presented.

DEMETRIUS

(in a louder whisper to COW, off)

Can't you hear in that outfit?

LUCINDA

(in a louder whisper, to BULL)

Does the headpiece block your ears?

DEMETRIUS

(in a whisper to COW, off)

Don't you have that taste for good sense any more? Not even courtly good sense?

LUCINDA

(in a whisper, to BULL)

Why did you start in with me, if you knew you weren't going to take victory?

DEMETRIUS

(in a whisper to COW, off)

If you want the girl, come in after her! If not, what's been my function here?

LUCINDA

(in a whisper to BULL)

Doesn't having sloughed that pest mean anything?

DEMETRIUS

(in a whisper to COW, off)

What have you ever wanted but to get your body up against hers? Well? Details be damned details! It's come to that!

(The COW, now represented by a shapely woman-dancer in a tight, stylized costume, bounds onto the stage. The sudden slackening in the rope causes DEMETRIUS to lose his balance and let go. The BULL leaves off threatening LUCINDA and saunters up to the COW. The two animals examine each other cautiously. In the following speeches, DEMETRIUS and LUCINDA talk over and around them, as if afraid of disturbing them.)

LUCINDA

If you're waiting for me to say it, I'm stumped. If you're

waiting for me to ask, I'll ask: What have you brought me?

DEMETRIUS

(gesturing towards COW)

Presenting Miss Rippleawitch?

LUCINDA

Not really?

DEMETRIUS

There she stands.

LUCINDA

I don't see your idea.

DEMETRIUS

With Elysse being a bull...

LUCINDA

Oh, right! Only, there's Ronald.

DEMETRIUS

Oh, Ronald's withdrawn.

LUCINDA

Withdrawn! It's not like his.

DEMETRIUS

You may say so. He hasn't been like himself. Shaken, he says; profoundly shaken. Feeling himself every minute for patches of calfskin.

LUCINDA

It's a genuine danger.

DEMETRIUS

You may say so.

LUCINDA

Still, not to have persevered...

DEMETRIUS

Not to have persevered! With the girl falling into brutishness? Who gave the example there? And anyhow, when you carry at resolved, will you censure desisting? How do you have the face to?

LUCINDA

Change of heart.

DEMETRIUS

"Change of heart." Yes, well, that may be a description of you, it's not right for me. For me, the girl's interests always were critical - and now more than ever.

(LUCINDA looks undecided.)

Granted, it'd be better to get her her shape back - get them both back their shapes.

LUCINDA

That it would.

DEMETRIUS

That it would. But as it is ...

LUCINDA

Would you really say, this is a solution you can close hands around?

DEMETRIUS

Alternatives?

LUCINDA

Not so much that, but I was just thinking, any solution would have to be very much in the vein of Sirwith, wouldn't it?

DEMETRIUS

Very much in that vein - and don't think Ron hasn't been combing the city for him. And I had a look-see. But I confess, I'm never sure where to put my finger on him these days, old Sirwith.

LUCINDA

But he was -

(catches herself)

DEMETRIUS

Pardon?

LUCINDA

Well, why shouldn't you know? My first move was to have him here.

DEMETRIUS

Well, truth for a truth: I had him in about Rippleswitch, too.

LUCINDA

With the result?

DEMETRIUS

Nothing. Couldn't manage a thing. Or wouldn't. And with you?

LUCINDA

Just smiled and smiled.

DEMETRIUS

So could we say, then, that from what's available to us, we chose a fine - the finest - solution.

LUCINDA

It appears. But this is really for the two animals to work out

DEMETRIUS

Their decision.

LUCINDA

Let's watch them now.

(The "two animals" have meanwhile been circling each other exploratively. Now the BULL puts out a paw and tentatively touches the COW; the COW shies away. BULL repeats gesture; COW does not shy away. BULL repeats gesture; COW responds, putting its paw up against the BULL's. Each presses hard, as if to upset the other's balance. Suddenly they twine paws, fall to the ground and roll over, embracing.)

LUCINDA

God! Not here!

DEMETRIUS

Isn't that something.

LUCINDA

Just to go into it that way...

DEMETRIUS

Can you do anything?

LUCINDA

What can I do?

DEMETRIUS

Character of the place, clear light of day - you know: reasoning.

LUCINDA

They are beasts now!

DEMETRIUS

What moves beasts?

LUCINDA

Song. Song moves everybody. Dance. Everyone has his dance.

DEMETRIUS

Funny it should come to that...

LUCINDA

But I'm going to try.

DEMETRIUS

Yes, you try.

(In the manner of one trying to interest a child in some staid amusement, LUCINDA begins to hum a slow airuet, keeping the rhythm with a metallicly clicking heel. At first the animals pay no attention, but after a few measures they roll free of each other, prop themselves on their elbows, and listen.

Still humming, LUCINDA draws DEMETRIUS to her and begins fancying with him, by way of a demonstration. The animals get up, expressing by their gestures, "that looks like fun!" They imitate LUCINDA and DEMETRIUS, at first clumsily, but soon with dexterity and pleasure.

A pipe-like instrument - say, an alto recorder - takes over the tune from LUCINDA. LUCINDA and DEMETRIUS dance through till the end of the play. The animals dance until indicated.)

DEMETRIUS

Aren't they the dancers, though!

LUCINDA

(to herself)

Seeming to take to it... Then what makes me as sure as I am that some trap's being sprung here...?

DEMETRIUS

My lord! Are we still on traps?

LUCINDA

You know, in the end, one isn't to be had: everyone, it appears, needing his own too badly. I went abroad and tried, I had Elyse try. Nothing. Not a thing. So forget it - only don't forget how I came to my need of it.

DEMETRIUS

Now I'm glad you mention that. Because I think I've got a solution there as well.

LUCINDA

Aren't you rick on the solutions today!

(a second thought)

As well as what?

DEMETRIUS

As well as for Ronald and Elyse.

LUCINDA

Ein.

DEMETRIUS

Now as I understand it - and I'm not sure even at this late date that I really do - it isn't so much you want me out of the bedroom -

LUCINDA

Dear, of course not!

DEMETRIUS

You just want a little breathing-room, that's all; whereas my idea is, more of a piece. Right?

(LUCINDA makes a gesture signifying "Mm - sort of")

All right, then, here's what I did.

(At this point the COW and the BULL begin to leave off the dance, and resume pawing at each other. By the final tableau they are lying on the ground, embracing each other. The transition from elegance to bestiality must be accomplished by a very gradual modification of gesture.)

The beds I didn't touch. They're just as they were: eight inches apart as measured along the new rug. So that leaves you nothing to complain of there. But - I took round-the-house stuff and threw it into the gap; you know, paper, bottles, the garden tools, flowers and old cloth - anything I could pick up. With the result that now I've got the gap filled, and if I sling a counterpane across, we'll have one continuous bed-area, you see, but still really two quite discrete beds.

LUCINDA

It isn't really -

DEMETRIUS

Darling, it's a very equitable solution and I must ask you to stick by it.

LUCINDA

I suppose you must. But coming so much out of the trappings of the situation, and so little - not at all - from their bearing... and when the paper crumbles?

DEMETRIUS

Hm?

LUCINDA

The paper will crumble, cloth tatter, flowers shrivel away.

DEMETRIUS

I don't think we'll ever want for things to deliver into that gap.

LUCINDA

I suppose not.

(glances at COW and BULL)

They seem to be falling out of step.

DEMETRIUS

Another thing. I should tell you something about those two - or about mine, anyway. It's no Miss Rippleswitch under spells. It's Ronald in a suit.

LUCINDA

Mine's Elyse.

(pause)

In a suit.

(pause; during which they dance)

Did we really have to tell each other that?

DEMETRIUS

Not since they're doing so well.

LUCINDA

They've accepted their animal nature.

DEMETRIUS

With a change of sex, you notice.

LUCINDA

To get what their sex was for.

DEMETRIUS

That's so. But look at them set to! Jolly beasts now!

LUCINDA

One has already forgotten which is which.

(With a trilled cadence in the pipe music, the dance comes to an end, DEMETRIUS and LUCINDA bowing deeply and holding. The BULL and the COW lie motionless and entwined on the ground.

On the last few notes of the music, a spot has come up and picked out, up-center in the darkened alley, the profile and hands of the piper, who ~~is~~ ^{is seen} as the curtain falls is seen to be SIRWITH.)

falls is

*as the curtain
falls is seen
to be SIRWITH.)*

The End