

MARINO FALIERO

(FROM THE TRAGEDY OF MARINO FALIERO; ACT II. SCENE I.)

Marino Faliero, the octogenarian Doge of Venice, hears from his nephew and adopted son of a deadly insult offered to the reputation of his young wife by a nobleman whom he has publicly disgraced for misconduct in public.

MARINO FALIERO *and the* DUCHESS.

Faliero. It does not please thee, then, if silence have
Speech, and if thine speak true, to hear me praise
Bertuccio? Has my boy deserved of thee
Ill? or what ails thee when I praise him?

Duchess.

Sir,

How should it hurt me that you praise—

Faliero.

My son,

Mine, more than once my brother's: how, indeed?

Duchess. Have I the keeping of your loves in charge
To unseal or seal their utterance up, my lord?

Faliero. Again, thy lord! I am lord of all save thee.

Duchess. You are sire of all this people.

Faliero.

Nay, by Christ,

A bitter brood were mine then, and thyself
 Mismatched worse than April were with snow
 Or January with harvest, being his bride
 Who bore so dire a charge of fatherhood.
 Thou, stepmother of Venice? and this hand,
 That could not curb nor guide against its will
 A foot that fell but heavier than a dove's,
 What power were in it to hold obedience fast,
 Laid on the necks of lions?

Duchess. Why, men say
 The lion will stoop not save to ladies' hands,
 But such as mine may lead him.

Faliero. Thine? I think
 The very wolf would kiss and rend it not.

Duchess. The very sea-wolf?

Faliero. Verily, so meseems.

Duchess. For so the strong sea-lion of Venice doth.

Faliero. This is a perilous beast whereof thou sayest
 So sweet a thing so far from like to be—
 A horrible and a fiend-faced shape, men call
 The lion of the waters.

Duchess. But St. Mark
 Holds his in leash of love more fast, my lord,
 Than ever violence may.

Faliero. By heaven and him,
 Thy sweet wit's flight is even too fleet for me:
 No marvel though thy gentle scorn smite sore
 On weaker wits of younglings: yet I would,

Being more my child than even my wife to me,
Thine heart were more a sister's toward my son.

Duchess. So is it indeed—and shall be so—and more,
The more we love our father and our lord,
Shall our two loves grow full, grow fire that springs
To Godward from the sacrifice it leaves
Consumed for man's burnt-offering.

Faliero. What! thine eyes
Are very jewels of even such fire indeed.
I thought not so to kindle them: but yet
My heart grows great in gladness given of thine
Whose truth in such bright silence as is God's
Speaks love aloud and lies not.

Duchess. No, my lord.

Faliero. It is not truth nor love then, sweet my child,
That lightens from thine eyeshot?

Duchess. Yea, my lord.

Faliero. I grow less fond than foolish, troubling
thee,
Who yet am held or yet would hold myself
Not yet unmanned with dotage. Sooth is this,
I am lighter than my daily mood today
And heedless haply lest I wrong mine age
And weary thine with words unworthy thee
Or him that would be honoured of the world
Less than beloved—with love not all unmeet—
Of one or twain he loves as old men may.
Bertuccio loves me; thou dost hate me not

That like a frost I touch thy flower, and breathe
 As March breathes back the spirit of winter dead
 On May that dwells where thou dost: but my son
 Finds no more grace of thee to comfort him
 Than April wins of the east wind. Wot thou well,
 The long loose tongues of Tuscan wit would cast
 Ill comment on this care of mine to bring
 More close my wife's heart and my son's, being young,
 And I a waif of winter, left astrand
 Above the soft sea's tidemark whose warm lip
 Is love's, that loves not age's: but I think
 We are none of those whose folly, set in shame,
 Makes mirth for John of Florence.

Duchess,
 No.

By God's grace,

Faliero. And by grace of pure Venetian pride'
 And blood of blameless mothers. By St. Mark,
 Shame, that stings sharpest of the worms in hell,
 Seems, if those light-souled folks sing true, to them
 No more a burning poison than the fly's
 We brush from us, and know not: but for men
 The eternal fire hath no such fang to smite
 As this their jests make nought of. Life is brief—
 Albeit thou knowest not, nor canst well believe,
 But life is long and lovesome as thine age
 In vision sees it, and in heart uplift
 Plays prelude clear of presage—brief and void
 Where laughing lusts fulfil its length of days

And nought save pleasure born seems worth desire ;
 But long and full of fruit in all men's sight
 Whereon the wild worm feeds not, nor the sun
 Strikes, nor the wind makes war, nor frost lays hold,
 Is the ageless life of honour, won and worn
 With heart and hand most equal, and to time
 Given as a pledge that something born of time
 Is mightier found than death, and wears of right
 God's name of everlasting.

Duchess.

Child I am,

Or child my lord will call me, yet himself
 Knows this not better, holds no truer this truth,
 Nor keeps more fast his faith in it than I.

Faliero. No need thy tongue should witness with
 thine eyes

How thine heart beats toward honour. Blind were he,
 And mad with base brainsickness even to death,
 Who seeing thee should not see it. Those Florentines
 With names more gracious than their customs crown
 Glad heads of graceless women ; jewelled names
 That mock the bright stone's fire of constant heart,
 Diamante, Gemma ; thine, were thine as these,
 Might dare the vaunt unchallenged : such a name
 Is in those eyes writ clear with fire more keen
 Than ever shame bade shine or sin made burn
 Where grace lay dead ere death. How now, my son ?

Enter BERTUCCIO.

Bertuccio. Most noble uncle—

Faliero. Nay, but art thou mazed?
No reverence toward our lady, nor a look
Save as of one distraught with fear, whose dreams
Are still as fire before his eyes by night
That leaves them dark by daytime? Yestereve,
Hadst thou so looked upon the bull, by Christ,
Thou hadst come not home his conqueror.

Duchess. Sir, perchance
Your nephew with your grace would speak alone.

Bertuccio. Ay, madam.

Faliero. Nay, sir. Why, what coil is this?
Thine eyes look scarce half drunken, but thy speech
Is thicker than with wine.

Duchess. Good day, my lords,

Faliero. Pass out of earshot if thou list, but pass
—I pray thee, sweet!—no further.

[Duchess withdraws.]

Now, my son,
If nought bemuse thy brain or bind thy tongue,
Speak.

Bertuccio. Sire, I may not.

Faliero. God consume thee! nay,
But bring thy wits back healed—what dost thou then
Here?

Bertuccio. What must needs, in my despite and thine,

Be done, and yet should be not. None but I
 Dare tell my sire that Venice rings and roars
 Aloud with monstrous mockery whence our name
 Is rent as carrion by the vulturous beaks
 That feed on fame and soil it. Sir, it were
 A shame beyond all treason for my lips
 To take this taint upon them: read, and see
 What all have seen that in thine hall of state
 Since dawn have entered, on thy sovereign seat
 Nailed up in God's defiance and ours, a lie
 That hell would hear not unrebuked, nor heaven
 Endure and find no thunder.

[Gives a paper to Faliero.

Faliero.

God us aid!

Why, if the pageant match thy prologue, man,
 The stage should shake to bear it.—Body of God!
 What?

Duchess. Sir! my lord!

Bertuccio.

Forbear him.

Faliero.

Does the sun

Shine?—Did he smite me on the face?

Duchess.

Who?

Faliero.

He.

[Pointing to Bertuccio.

Duchess. What have you given him?

Bertuccio.

Ask not.

Faliero.

Let me think—

Art not thou too Faliero, and my son?

Bertuccio. Ay.

Faliero. By the glory of God in heaven, I swear,
I think not as I thought it.

Bertuccio. Then your thought
Errs, and the mind whose passion brings it forth
Strays far, and shakes toward ruin.

Faliero. It may be so,
Sir; it may be so.

Duchess. Heaven have pity on all!

Faliero. Madam, what man is this that speaks
to me?

Duchess. My lord your nephew.

Faliero. Thine? thy lord is this?
Thy man? thy master?

Bertuccio. Sir, bethink you—

Faliero. Ay—

I will bethink me surely. Fair my wife,
I pray you pardon mine unreverend age,
Shamed as it stands before you—spurned, and made
A thing for boys to spit at. In my sight,
I pray you, do not smile too broad at it.
White hairs, if he that bears them bear my place,
Are held, I know, unvenerable of all.
Fair sir, you are young, and men may honour you:
Tell me, who am b'ind, how I should bear myself
In the eyes of men who see me that I see
Nothing.

Duchess. O God, be pitiful!

Bertuccio. My lord,
 Refrain yourself; you stagger toward the pit
 Whose gulf is madness; gather up your heart;
 Give not all rein to rage.

Faliero. I will not, sir.
 There was a noise of hissing in mine ears;
 I could not hear you for it; and in mine eyes
 Blank night, and fire, and blindness. Now I see
 The leprous beggar whom the town spits out
 Hath more than I of honour. Many a year
 I have dreamed of many a deed that brought not
 shame,

Not shame at all, but praise: these were not mine,
 I know them now, they were not: mine have earned
 For the utmost crown and close of all my life
 Shame. I would know, were God not stricken dumb,
 What deed I have done that this should fall on me.

Bertuccio. My lord—

Faliero. Thy servant's servant, and a dog.
 Yet art thou, too, vile; nay, not vile as I,
 But baser than a beaten bondman.

Bertuccio. Sir,
 If madness make you not a thrall indeed,
 But reverence yet claim reverence, take some thought
 Not for yourself, nor me.

Faliero. Dost thou desire
 So much for her sake of me? Son of mine,
 Look well upon thy father: let mine eyes

Take all the witness of the spirit in thine,
 That I may know what heart thou hast indeed.
 Bertuccio, if thine eyes lie, then is God
 Dead, and the world hell's refuse.

Bertuccio. Sire and lord,
 If ever I have lied to you, I lie
 Now.

Faliero. I believe thou liest not. Mark me, son,
 This is no little trust I put in thee,
 Believing yet, in face of this I read,
 That man or God may lie not.

Bertuccio. Speak to her.

Faliero. Take comfort, child: this world is foul,
 God wot,
 That gives thee need of comfort.

Duchess. I have none—
 No need, I mean—if nought fare ill with you.

Faliero. Much, much there is fares ill with all men :
 yet,
 With thee, if righteousness were loved in heaven,
 Should nought at all fare ill for ever. Sweet,
 As thou wouldst fain, if thou couldst ever sin,
 Find for that sin forgiveness, pardon me.
 I am great in years, and what I had borne in youth,
 Not well perchance, yet better, now, being old,
 I cannot bear, thou seest, at all. For this
 Forgive me: not with will of mine it was
 That thus I scared so sore thy harmless heart.

Speak to me not now : ere this hour be full,
 It may be we may speak awhile again
 Together : now must none abide with me. [Exit.

Duchess. What have they said ?

Bertuccio. Ask never, that of man.

Duchess. What have they said of me ?

Bertuccio. I cannot say.

Duchess. Thou wilt not—being mine enemy. Why,
 for shame

You should not, sir, keep silence.

Bertuccio. Yet I will.

Duchess. I never dreamt so dark a dream as this.

Bertuccio. God send it no worse waking.

Duchess. Now I know

You are even indeed her enemy, who believed
 She had never so deserved of you. I have
 No friend where friends I thought were mine, and
 find,

Where never I thought to find them, enemies. Whence
 Have I deserved by chance of any man
 That he should be mine enemy ?

Bertuccio. If I be,
 I would not strike you shamefully at heart,
 But rather bear a bitterer blame than this
 Than right myself with doing you wrong. Would God
 Your enemies and mine uncle's all were I !

Duchess. Do you know them—these—what manner
 of men they are ?

Bertuccio. Save as I know that hell breeds worms
and fire,

No.

Duchess. Have I merited these? Have we that
loved,

Have we that love, in God's clear sight or man's,
Sinned?

Bertuccio. Nay, not thou, if heaven by love for earth
Sins not: if thou, then God in loving man
Sins.

Duchess. Nay: for yet you never kissed my lips.
That day the truth sprang forth of thine, I swore
It should not bring my soul and thine to shame.
And thou too, didst not thou, for very love,
Swear it?

Bertuccio. And stands mine oath not whole?

Duchess. Give God

Honour, who hath kept in us our honour fast.
Whatever come between our death and this,
For that I thank him.

Bertuccio. Ah, my love, my light,
Soul of my soul, and holier heart of mine,
Thee, thee I thank, that yet I live, and yet
Love, and yet stand not in all true men's eyes
Shamed. Am I pure as thou, that save through thee
I should be found no viler than I am?
Hadst thou been other, I perchance, God knows,
Had been a baser thing than galls us now.

Duchess. Ay! but I knew it or ever I wrung it
forth—

Me then they smite at, and my lord in me,
Who have smitten him so sorely?

Bertuccio. Dear, how else?
When seemed our sire a furious weakling, made
For any wind to work upon and wrest
Awry with passion that had struck no root
Deep even as love or honour?

Duchess. Woe is me!
Would God I were not!

Re-enter FALIERO.

Faliero. Pray thou no such prayer:
I heard that cry to Godward: call it back.
My faultless child, if prayer seem good to thee,
Pray: but for nought like death. And doubt thou not
But yet thou hast given me daily more good things
Than God can give of evil; nor may man,
Albeit his fang be deadlier than the snake's
And strike too deep for God or thee to heal,
Undo the good thou didst, or make a curse
Grow where thou sowedst a blessing. Go in peace;
And take with thee love's full thanksgiving. Go.

Duchess. My father, and my lord!

Faliero. My child and wife,
Go. *[Exit Duchess.]*

Now to thee, son. When thou gavest me this,
 I do not ask thee if thou knewest the man.
 It were impossible, out of reach of thought,
 That mine own brother's and mine own heart's child
 Should give it me, and say—I know the man :
 He lives : I did not take him by the throat
 And make the lying soul leap through his lips
 Before I told thee such a thing could live.

Bertuccio. You do me right : I know not.

Faliero.

This remains,

That we should know : being known, to thee nor me
 Belongs the doomsman's labour of the lash
 That is to scourge him out of life. My son,
 I charge thee by thine honour and my love
 Thou lay no hand upon him.

Bertuccio.

Nay, my lord,

Nay—

Faliero. Swear me this.

Bertuccio.

I will not.

Faliero.

Swear, I say.

Bertuccio. I cannot swear it, father.

Faliero.

By Christ's blood,

But swear thou shalt, and keep it. Do not make
 Thy sire indeed mad with more monstrous wrong
 Than yet bows down his head dishonoured. Swear.

Bertuccio. What ?

Faliero.

That albeit his life lay in thine hand
 Thou wouldst not bruise it with a finger.

Bertuccio. Sir,
How can I ?

Faliero. Sir, by God, thou shalt not choose.
Art thou the hangman ?

Bertuccio. If the knave perchance
Be noble ?

Faliero. Dost thou mock thyself and me ?
Noble ?

Bertuccio. My lord, I would not wrong the worst
Of all that wrong the names they wear : but yet
I cannot see in Venice one save one
Who might, being born base, and of no base name,
Conceive himself so far your enemy.

Faliero. Boy,
What knowest thou of their numbers that have cause,
Being vile, to hate me ? Hath my rule not been
Righteous ?

Bertuccio. That stands not questionable of man.

Faliero. How then should more not hate than
love me ? Child,
Child !

Bertuccio. But a man's wrath strikes more straight,
my lord,
How vile soe'er, than toward a woman. This—
This is a dog's tooth that hath poisoned you :
And yestereve a dog it was your bade
Spurn out of sight of honour.

Faliero. Steno ?

Bertuccio.

He.

Else am not I Faliero.

Faliero.

Then—I say,

Then,—be it so,—what wouldst thou do ? Being my
son,

What wouldst thou dream or do, this being so ?

Bertuccio.

Why,

With God's good will and yours, and good men's leave,
Hew out his heart for dogs to gnaw. Might this
Displease you ?

Faliero.

Why then yet is this to do ?

Bertuccio. Forgive me, father, and God forgive me :
this

I am all on fire with shame to have spoken of
And think the man lives while I prate. But you
Know, and our Lord God knows, it is but now,
Now, even this instant breath of imminent time,
That I have guessed this.

Faliero.

Ay ; we know it well ;

We, God and I.

Bertuccio.

And both of you give leave—

Or leave I crave of neither—pardon me,
But leave I crave not to set heel on him.

Faliero. God gives not leave ; and I forbid thee.

Bertuccio.

Then,

In God's teeth and in yours, I will, or God
Shall smite me helpless by your hand. My lord,
You do but justice on me, so to seem—

I would not say, to dwell in doubt of me.
I should have passed ere this out of your sight,
Silent.

Faliero. Thou shouldst not. Is this burden sore
That as thou sayest God lays on thee, or I,
To be as I am patient ?

Bertuccio. Fain would I
Be, would God help me, even as you—were you
As I now stand, though shamefaced, in your sight.

Faliero. Ay—you are young and shamefaced—I am
old,
And in my heart the shame is. But your face
Hath honour in it—and what have I to do,
What should I do with honour ? Thou dost make
Of mine more havoc and less count of me
Than yet mine enemies have, to take this charge
Upon the personal quarrel of thine hand,
Unchartered by commission.

Bertuccio. And of me,
My lord, of me what make you ? How shall men
Not spit when I pass by, at one that had
Nor heart nor hand, eye to behold nor ear
To hear the several scoffs, by glance or speech,
That base men cast on us ? Nay, then what right
Had I to call any man base that lives
Or any worm that stings in secret ? Sir,
Put not this shame upon me : when have I
Deserved it ? Why, a beaten dog, a slave

Branded and whipped by justice, durst not bear
For very shame's sake, though he know not shame,
So great dishonour.

Faliero. Thou shalt bear it, son.

Bertuccio. I will not.

Faliero. Son, what will is this of thine
To lift its head up when I bid it lie
And listen while mine own, thy father's will,
Speaks? How shalt thou that wilt not honour me
Take in thine hand mine honour? Mine, not thine,
Not yet, I. tell thee, thine it is to say
Thou shalt or shalt not strike or spare the stroke
That is to make my fame, if hurt it be,
Whole. I, not thou, it is that heads the house
And bears the burden: I, not thou, meseems,
It was that fought at Zara. Nay, thine eyes
Answer, an old man then was young, and I
That now am young then was not: nor in sooth
Would I misdoubt or so misprize thee, boy,
As not to think thou hadst done as gladly well
As I that service, had it lain in thee,
Or any toward our country. But myself
Am not so bowed and bruised of ruinous time,
Not yet so beaten down of trampling years,
That I should make my staff or sword of thee,
And strike by delegation. On the state
Is laid the charge of right and might to deal
Justice for all men and myself and thee

By sovereignty of duty ; not on us
Lies of that load whereto the law puts hand
One feather's or one grain's weight. More : did we
Take so much on us of the general charge,
We were not loyal : and the dog we strike
Were yet, though viler than a leper's hound,
No viler then than we, who by God's gift
Being born of this the crown of commonweals,
Venetian, so should cast our crown away
That men born subject, unashamed to be
Called of their king subjects, might scoff at us
As children of no loftier state than theirs.
For where a man's will hangs above men's heads
Sheer as a sword or scourge might, and not one
Save by his grace hath grace to call himself
Man—there, if haply one be born a man,
Needs must he break the dogleash of the law
To do himself, being wronged, where no right is,
Right : but as base as he that should not break,
To show himself no dog, but man, their law,
Were he, that civic thief, the trustless knave
Who should not, being as we born masterless,
Put faith in freedom and the free man's law,
Justice, but like a king's man born, compelled
To cower with hounds or strike with rebels, rise
And right himself by wrong of all men else,
Shaming his country ; saying, ' I trust thee not ;
I dare not leave my cause upon thine hand,

Mine honour in thy keeping lies not sure ;
 I must not set the chance of my good name
 On such a dicer's cast as this, that thou
 Wilt haply, should it like thee, do me right.'
 No citizen were this man, nor unmeet
 By right of birth and civic honour he
 To call a man sovereign and lord : nor here
 Lives one, I think, so vile a fool as this.
 For me, my faith is in the state I serve
 And those my fellow-servants, in whose hands
 Rests now mine honour safe as theirs in mine.
 Which trust should they redeem not, but give up
 In mine their own fame forfeit, this were not
 Venice.

Bertuccio. But if perchance the thing fall out ?
 If some be peradventure less than thou
 Venetian, equal-souled and just of eye,
 Must our own hands not take our own right up ?
 If these abuse their honour, and forbear,
 For love's or fear's sake, justice ?

Faliero. If the sun
 Leap out of heaven down on the Lido there
 And quench him in Giudecca. [Rises.

Bertuccio. Sir, but then -

Faliero. I charge thee, speak thereof to me no
 more.