

2-Countess-Duke

We grew up together.

Nice girl?

Very nice.

A thousand louis?

Two thousand.

Agreed!

Twenty-four hours.

Oh, yes. You might discover something about her you don't know yet.

You might discover something about her you don't know yet.

Such as?

The woman you intend to dishonor in a day is, in three days, to become my wife. Have a good day, sir.

Exit Raoul.

The Duke hits his head several times against a convenient piece of furniture.

The Countess enters.

Is Raoul gone?

RAOUL

DUKE

RAOUL

Pause.

DUKE

Pause.

RAOUL

DUKE

They shake hands.

RAOUL

DUKE

RAOUL

DUKE

RAOUL

COUNTESS

DUKE

Your very normal Norman leaves you his best regards. He prides himself in his manhood, and is therefore unable to accept favors from you.

COUNTESS

Why did you have to tell him –

DUKE

I did not. He is both manly and smart, what a catch!

COUNTESS

Anything else you touched upon, other than his manhood?

DUKE

I leave the touching of his manhood to you, my dear.

Pause.

He and I, we made the bet.

COUNTESS

The bet?

DUKE

You know me.

COUNTESS

Regarding who?

The Duke smirks.

Oh, really. You know they are engaged?

DUKE

You neglected to tell me.

COUNTESS

She just told me.

DUKE

And he told me. Don't get in my way.

COUNTESS

I wouldn't dream of it.

DUKE

I wouldn't dream of you dreaming of it. Why did you drag her into the garden with you?

COUNTESS

To give you a chance to bathe.

DUKE

Isn't this fascina//ting.

COUNTESS

Conside//rate.

DUKE

Convenient.

Pause.

My bet happens to coincide with your interests. You want the strapping Chevalier Raoul to be all unstrapped of previous commitments.

COUNTESS

I'd be delighted to assist you to the best of my abilities.

DUKE

Swear to me you won't tell her.

COUNTESS

I promise.

DUKE

Swear it.

COUNTESS

I give you my word.

Pause.

DUKE

Swear it.

Pause.

COUNTESS

I swear.

DUKE

Thank you, darling.

COUNTESS

And your plan...?

DUKE

Write to your inestimable husband and invite myself to dinner. Make myself presentable. Drink at least three bottles of his claret. After dinner, rush into Paris, and reconnoiter the battlefield.

COUNTESS

And, at some point, I presume, passionately plead your beloved's case?

DUKE

Yes – yes – of course – Hotel de Ville, she said, didn't she? That shouldn't be difficult. The night porter knows me by the jangle of my coins, and you've just presented me with a lovely purse. And then – our rendezvous – I break the news to her – she is grateful, warm, soft, pliant....

COUNTESS

I wish you luck.

DUKE

I'm delighted. Now I shall go and write to your worse half. Darling.

COUNTESS

Dearest.

Exit the Duke.

The Countess calls into the garden.

COUNTESS

Gabrielle, my friend!

Enter Gabrielle.

COUNTESS

I'm afraid I've done you a disservice, my dear.

GABRIELLE

I'm certain her highness is incapable of anything base.

COUNTESS

I wished so much to hear your sad tale without distractions that I have invited you into the garden. That prevented you from pleading your case with his excellency, the man who holds so much sway and could plead for you so powerfully! You should write to him!

GABRIELLE

Write?

COUNTESS

Yes. You should write to him and request an interview. In private.