

Two Gentlemen of Milano

Winner, *Hand To Mouth Players*, Westchester, NY

[AT RISE, we see the Milano brothers, Princes Renatto and Staccato standing on a parapet at their castle]

Staccato:

The days are dark, dear brother.

Renatto:

Verily, dark and getting darker now that poor King Verona hath shuffled off his mortal coil. Ever since his recent sad demise, it feels as if our sun has set, ne'er to rise again. His aura has faded, gone like a passing shadow.

Staccato:

Yes, like unto the moon that fades in the morning.

Renatto:

Or the morning mist, consumed by the heat of the sun.

Staccato:

Going, going, gone.

Renatto:

But take heart, Staccato. Darkness oft breeds the light of opportunity.

Staccato:

Dear brother state your meaning.

Renatto:

As you full well know, in the natural order of things the land must have an heir, and at this very moment the land is heirless.

Staccato:

No air? I can't breath (gasps).

Renatto:

Ha ha ha. Play not the fool with me, Staccato. We cannot have an unmarried queen. The land must have an heir.

Staccato:

True that, brother. The widowed Queen must needs be wedded and bedded.

Renatto:

And one of us from the noble House of Milano must do the deed. It should be you, dear brother. In face and figure, the gods indeed endowed you like unto a young Adonis.

Staccato:

Stop, Renatto, you make the color rush my cheeks like a wave of hot sauce. But forsooth in truth, it should be you that weds the queen. With thy abundant wit and wisdom in the ways of words, as Jove himself would attest, thou art one brainy brother.

Renatto:

'Tis true I have a high I.Q. A blessing and a curse.

Staccato:

But what shall we do now? Both you and I are worthy suitors to the crown... Zounds, I have it! Brother Renatto. With my body and thy brain, we should rule in twain! Renatto and Staccato, that's our motto.

Renatto:

Au contraire, mon frère. Sorry, but herein lies the rub. One crown cannot fit two heads.

Staccato:

Forsooth ain't that the truth. But oh, how this poor pate doth ache with such a weighty problem.

Renatto:

Dear brother, let us think outside the royal box...egad, I have it! Brother, lend me your ear.

Staccato:

One ear, coming up.

Renatto:

Each of us, in his own manner will bring suit to the queen. With grace and beauty you shall woo. And I, with wit, shall join the battle, too.

Staccato:

But hold. What if by chance the queen doth favor your superior mind? What then dost happen to my sorry-ass behind?

Renatto:

Fear not. We'll make this pledge:
No matter who doth win the queen's fair hand,

The loser brother's second in command.

Staccato:

Thy brilliance doth blind me! Then giveth me thy hand. This pledge we make in true fraternity.

Renatto:

Let it be so, bro.

Staccato:

Adieu, adieu my dear sweet brother, I'm off to see my clothier.

With style and grace a handsome suit he'll tailor,
And then I'll have the look that's sure to nail her.

[Staccato exits]

Renatto:

My brother's an Adonis but he's thick.

He often does his thinking with his prick.

The world may think me jealous of this tool

But why should I let such a lunk-head rule?

A potion that will kill him, that's the thing I need.

Let heaven be my judge. Now I must make good speed.

[Exit]

Scene II

A swamp. Three hags sit around a cauldron.

Sisters:

We're the sisters of the heath
Dwelling in the murky muck
Come to us and try your luck
Find your joy or find your grief.

Sister One:

Sisters, something this way inches
One of the Milano princes

Sister Two:

Is it the handsome one, Staccato?

Sister Three:

Nay it's the ugly one, Renatto.

Sister One:

State your business,

Sister Two:

State your pleasure.

Sister Three:

State what 'ere you wish to treasure.

Renatto:

Sisters of the Swamp please hear me
But I entreat, come nowhere near me.
Nature hath rebelled against thee
Cursed thee with the face that scares me.

Sister Two:

Look upon us and despair
State your business, grow a pair.

Renatto:

Very well, I will entreat,
Let's see if you can do the feat.
I need a potion—make that two,
One that kills, one that woos.

Sister One:

Oh my, he speaks of love and death
Opposites in one foul breath.

Sister Two:

Who's the one whose life you'll pluck
And who's the one you'd like to....

Sister Three:

Sister sister! Watch thy tongue
Can't you hear, the bell has rung?
Time for us to spin two charms,
One to help, one to harm.

Sister One:

I'll throw in a gator's tooth
Add some black rum, 90 proof
Toss in guts of week old grouper
That'll put him in a stupor
Add to it a rattler's breath
Just one sip and sudden death.

Sisters:

We're the sisters of the heath
Dwelling in the murky muck
Come to us and try your luck
Find your joy or find your grief.

Sister Two:

Essence of the passion fruit,
Shavings from a ginger root.
Feather from a snowy egret,
Drops of mating gator sweat
A sloppy kiss from Cupid's lips
With just one sip she'll spread her hips.

Sister Three:

Here Renatto, your two charms
One for love, one for harm
One of them you take to bed
One of them will make you dead

Renatto:

Thank you hags for your dark play

Sister One:

Oh not so fast—what wilt thou pay?

Renatto:

Pay?

Sister Two:

Pay!

Sister Three:

Pay!

Renatto:

Once I am King I shall be rich

Sister Two:

It's not for money that we itch.

Sister Three:

Who wants money? That's just fluff.
What we seek is sterner stuff

Renatto:

Then what dost thou desire instead?

Sister One:

One little thing: Your brother's head.

Sister Two:

He looketh spooked, our dear Renatto,
Don't you want your brother blotto?

Sister Three:

Once he quaffs this wicked potion
Off with his head in one quick motion
But if thee fail his head deliver
All of us shall eat your liver.

Renatto:

All right you hags if that's your wish
I'll serve his head up on a dish
Now give to me the magic drinks
I must away, 'cuz this swamp stinks!

[Sister three hands him the potions]

Sisters:

We're the sisters of the heath
Dwelling in the murky muck
Come to us and try your luck
Find your joy or find your grief.

Scene Three: The queen's court

Queen Calista is seated on the throne, holding a scroll. Her man in waiting, Bolonius sleeps in his chair.

Queen:

Bolonius! Wake up, and drag thy ungodly body over here, or thou shalt sleep with the fishes.

Bolonius:

So sorry, my queen, it seems as if dark Morpheus hath slipped his nefarious fingers 'round these orbs only a moment ago.

Queen:

Only a moment? 'Tis full well been half the day. And look at thee, with thy braces undone, thy hair unkempt, thy garters un-gartered. We full well know the flower of youth hath wilted from thee, but puh-lease, garter up, man.

Bolonius:

My queen, pray grant me a moment to amend my discombobulation.

Queen:

This spinning ball, our Earth could round the sun ten times o'er and still not yield time enough for thee to get thy head on straight. To the quick now: [Shakes a scroll] This agenda. What is the meaning of this?

Bolonius:

My queen, grim Thanatos hath taken off your beloved husband, our cherished king, whose looks did surely set the bar of manhood high. Now he dwells in death's hoary bosom, far too soon, far too soon.

Queen:

Dunce! Dost thou think I know this not? Dost thou not see how I mourn, how I swoon, how I wail every day for my lost king...well, not *every* day, forsooth...but come, come, what is your meaning?

Bolonius:

Your grief, your grace is most palpable. However, I must needs proffer this gentle reminder: Just as the night follows the day, the land must needs a king. And to this necessary end, if you would so graciously unroll the scroll, you will see I have compiled a list of eligible suitors for thy royal hand.

Queen [reads from list]:

If I must, I must...let's see here...Egad, The Viscount of Verona Walk? A philanderer of the first degree. The Prince of Pelican Dale? Does he not prefer a plump male rump?

Queen and Bolonius:

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Queen:

The Earl of Estero Wood? Surely thou must know, the man's breath is most grievous. It could slay a dragon. And who are these last two? Renatto and Staccato? They sound Italian.

Bolonius:

They are the two gentlemen of Milano. Not rustic fellows these. Nay, fortune has favored them with good lucks, brains, and...

Queen:

And?

Bolonius:

And they are well endowed...with real estate, I mean.

Queen:

And that will suffice to heal this grieving heart?

Bolonius:

Thou could do worse. Even though thy mind's eye is clouded o'er with grief, perhaps it can see clearly that our former king, blessed be his memory, alas, before he met you, he hath not a farthing to fart upon.

Queen:

Ah, but the truth doth sting. I fell for the body, not the Benjamins. All right, Bolonius, on the morrow I shall meet with these Latin lovers.

Bolonius:

An excellent good choice. Two gentlemen of Milano. Disappointed, you shall not be.

Queen:

Whatever. But now I need to take my leave.

Bolonius:

Pressing affairs of state?

Queen:

Mani pedi

[Exit]

[Scene Four: Renatto and Staccato in Renato's dressing room]

Renatto:

Glorious good news, brother Staccato. Bolonius, our erstwhile friend at court has done us a solid. Her grace, Queen Calista has consented to receive us on the morrow.

Staccato:

One of us is sure to win her hand. And wrist. And arm. And shoulders. And collarbone. And the royal tatas!

Renatto:

Tame the heyday in thy blood, brother. The time will come when thou canst go full on Lothario. But for now, we must be gentle in our approach, like smooth, dappled waves lapping 'gainst the shore.

Staccato:

My nature is more akin to a rip-roaring rip curl.

Renatto:

Pray thee think with thy big head, not thy little one. Now, since the course of true love n'er runs smooth, I have come up with a little something to help grease the skids. Behold. [hold up bottles from the sisters of the swamp]

Staccato:

What's this? A bottle I see before me?

Renatto:

Not one bottle, but two.

Staccato:

Perfect. I could use a drink. Let us quaff them now.

Renatto:

Hold, dear brother, hold. These lovely vessels are gifts for the queen. Or wouldst't thou go to court a queen empty-handed?

Staccato:

Oh, as morning's light dawns upon the mighty Gibraltar rock, so doth thy wisdom dawn upon my poor rocky pate. A gift to woo.

Renatto:

Not one, but two. Now, this one is yours to hold. [hands him the bottle with poison]

Staccato:

What a beautiful red color. The color of cherries plucked in the flower of their youth.

Renatto:

Or the color of blood. Hold it fast, Staccato and on the morrow, we will share it once one of us is chosen by the queen.

Staccato:

Renatto and Staccato, that's our motto.

Renatto:

But wait, brother dear: Gods and monsters, what is it that I see before me? Already a stain on thy new suit?

Staccato:

Where?

Renatto:

There. Left side. Just below the nipple line.

Staccato:

Oh, no! Out damn spot! Sorry, brother, I must away to the cleaners. Until tomorrow then, adieu, adieu. [exits]

Renatto:

Adieu adieu to you, too. And don't forget the bottle! Poor brother, with thy fulsome looks and thy empty head. I remember as a child how I would trundle him upon my back in sport, as if I were the steed and he master. Oh, how the tables have turned. But time to put away those childish things. No pleasure doth it give me, now that I must do what I must do, for how does a man kill a thing he loves? 'Tis true. Politics makes strange deadfellows. [holds up his bottle]

If this charm will work as been foreseen,
I'm sure to catch the ardor of the queen.

[Exit]

[Scene Five, the royal palace. Seated on her throne is Queen Calista. Standing in front of her is Bolonius]

Queen:

Where are those damnable Italians? Bolonius, if they're not here in a trice, I'll have thy head on a pike.

Bolonius:

A moment, a moment... Ah, here they are. My queen, may I present Renatto and Staccato, the two gentlemen of Milano.

Renatto:

Your grace, we have heard tell of your beauty, but now, having basked in it, any words of praise that I could offer are but mere beggars, wanting sustenance.

Queen:

Nice. And what say you, brother two?

Staccato:

Uhm, what he said.

Queen:

This handsome one, which one is he?

Bolonius:

That would be this one, the dashing Staccato.

Queen:

Well, thou art pretty as a peacock, but a peacock's looks oft belie the sharpness of its talons.

Bolonius:

These peacocks, as you call them, they bear gifts, your grace.

Queen:

Do they now. How doth the saying go? Beware Italians bearing gifts?

Bolonius:

That's Greeks, your grace. And, as you can plainly see, they are not Greek. Of course, it's all Greek to me.

Queen:

Ha, Bolonius, that's classic. Gifts, you say? We shall take a look.

Renatto:

[holding up his bottle] Sweets to the sweet, your grace. This crystal vessel contains a libation such as you have never tasted. The nectar of the gods doth taste like rotten radish root compared to this.

Queen:

Pretty words, Renatto, pretty words. But words are made of breath. What I desire is sterner stuff. Bolonius, if you will.

Bolonius:

[takes bottle from Renatto] Ah, your grace, as I look upon this bottle, it hath excellent good color, rosy red, like the blush of a milk-cheeked maiden upon receiving her first kiss. Shall I decant it?

Queen:

Clodpoll, be quick about it, as thy description hast tantalized my tongue.

Bolonius:

Ah, the aroma —heady, sensual, but not too far from innocence. A veritable perfumery of the grape. And now for the tasting.

Renatto:

Wait...tasting?

Bolonius:

But of course. Nothing passes through her majesty's lips lest I first sample it.

Renatto:

But...

Bolonius:

Tut tut, good sir. Just a sip will suffice.

Renatto:

I'll say it will.

Bolonius:

[drinks] Ah, smooth, flavorful, and, and...I'm in love!

Renatto:

Well, at least it works.

Bolonius:

I am completely, totally, unflinchingly in love with you, sweet Renatto!

Renatto:

Oh snap! Hoisted on my own petard. Hey, Bolonius, take thy lovesick mitts off of me.

Bolonius:

What's that my pet? Oh hear his voice, like unto the dove's coo, calling me ever so sweetly, coo, coo. Come hither, my turtle dove, let us nestle together.

Staccato:

Lucky Renatto, to have found true love.

Renatto:

No I didn't. Bolonius, stop blowing in my ear.

Staccato:

I must toast the lover's passion with this drink my brother hath given me. Here's to you, Renatto and Bolonius—dare I call thee R and B.

Renatto:

Brother, wait!

Staccato:

No worries, bro. I'll save for you a goodly portion [drinks]...oh! A sudden pain from the knaves to the chops...what's this coursing through my veins?

Queen:

The pretty peacock looks unwell. As in, dropping dead unwell.

Staccato:

[gasping] Renatto, dear brother, I am poisoned by this drink. I am slain. I am dead.

Bolonius:

Well at least it wasn't you Renatto. My love, marry me!

Renatto:

I'd rather be dead. In fact, I think I shall be. Staccato, brother dear, now do I regret that dark ambition led me to this foul deed I did to you. And so in Hades shall I join you. Now let me drink. [takes bottle, drinks] Oh! I am dead, too.

Staccato:

No deader than I. I am taking the big sleep.

Renatto:

I am gone, gone, pushing up daisies.

Staccato:

I'm taking the dirt nap. I've kicked the proverbial bucket.

Renatto:

I have passed over. I've given up the ghost.

I'm dead as a doornail.

Staccato:

My bell has tolled.

Renatto:

I've gone to a better place.

Staccato:

Dearly departed am I. Adieu, adieu.

Renatto:

Will you two die already?

Queen:

Bolonius:
 Oh cruelest fate, to have dashed my love on the rocks of death before it reached full bloom. Renatto oh Renatto, where art thou, Renatto? No longer can I ride the emotional roller coaster of love. But wait. There's still a dram of poison liquid left here, and it is meant for me. [drinks]. Now I am dead, too. Goodbye cruel world. Good night, sweet prince. Renatto, I am coming.

Queen:
 Et tu, Bolonius?

[enter the sisters of the swamp]

How now, you wretched creatures. Who are you that dares defame my court?

Sisters:
 We're the sisters of the heath
 Dwelling in the murky muck
 Come to us and try your luck
 Find your joy or find your grief.

Queen:
 Tell me not that you are here to seek my hand as well.

Sister One:
 Nay, nay, it's not a hand we've come for, it's a head,
 We're here now to collect it 'cause he's dead.

Sister Two:
 Here lies the young and fair Staccato

And by his side evil Renatto
And hark, a third one, too, that's blotto

Sister Three:

So which one, sisters, shall we pick?
Any one will do the trick.

Queen:

Hags, hurry up and pick one. Better yet, take all three.

Sister One:

All three? But why?

Queen:

Why not? Three heads are better than one. Go now, and bear these bodies hence. Such a show of bloodshed cannot grace our court.

These silly fools, who sought to wear the crown,
T'was blind ambition that hath brought them down.

I need no man to show me how to rule,
If women ruled the world all would be cool.
We thank you for your time, dear audience.
The play is done. Let partying commence!

[lights]