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Title: Turandot: The Chinese Sphinx

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Release date: September 7, 2008 [eBook #26553]
Most recently updated: May 20, 2016

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Chuck Greif

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TURANDOT: THE CHINESE SPHINX ***

TURANDOT:

THE CHINESE SPHINX.

A DRAMATIC ODDITY

FREELY TRANSLATED FROM SCHILLER,

AND CORDIALLY INSCRIBED TO

LADY PERCY FLORENCE SHELLEY

BY

SABILLA NOVELLO.

LONDON: S. FRENCH, 89, STRAND.

1872.

Price One Shilling.

ACT I. ACT II. ACT III. ACT IV.

Personages.

ALTOUM, Khan of the Celestial Empire.

PANTALOOM, his Prime Minister.

TARTAGLIA, Lord Chancellor.

TRUFFALDIN, Keeper of the Hareem.

BRIGHELLA, Captain of the Imperial Black Guards.

KALAF, Prince of Tartary.

BARAK, his former Tutor.

ISHMAEL.

DOCTORS of THE DIVAN.

Courtiers, Guards, Priests, Slaves of the Hareem.

TURANDOT, Heiress to the Celestial throne: generally known as "The Chinese Sphinx."

SKIRINA, her attendant, wife to Barak.

ADELMA, Princess of Keicobad, slave to Turandot.

Female slaves of the Hareem.

SCENE.—*Peking and its environs.*

TURANDOT: THE CHINESE SPHINX.

ACT I.

SCENE.—Outskirts of Peking. L. View of town gate, above which are reared long poles, bearing turbaned and shorn heads, symmetrically disposed so as to form a kind of architectural ornament. R. Small suburban dwellings, from one of which issues PRINCE KALAF, dressed in a fantastic Tartar warrior's costume.

KALAF.

The Gods be thanked, at last by patient seeking,
I've found a lodging in this crowded Peking.

(Enter BARAK, in Persian costume; sees KALAF and starts, surprised.)

BARAK.

Prince Kalaf? 'tis not possible. He's dead!
Yet, sure 'tis he—his eyes—his legs—his head,—
My Lord!

KALAF.

What—Barak! here—alive?

BARAK.

And kicking.
But how escaped you from that fatal licking

The Bey of Tefflis gave us all in battle?
Your father's troops were slaughtered off like cattle,
And you, my Prince, we thought, were slain or taken;
So off I fled to save, at least, *my* bacon.
I found a refuge in this queer old city;
A widow married me for love—or pity.
We live like happy doves in yonder cot,—
My only grief,—the thought of your sad lot.

KALAF.

We never thought to meet again, dear Tutor,—
In China too!

BARAK.

For years I've taken root here.
But, dearest Prince, how was it, tell me, pray,
You 'scaped the perils of that dreadful day?

KALAF.

Breathe not my name! A price is on my head;
I've roamed from land to land; have toiled for bread.
As slave I served the Shah of Keicobad;
This King a fair and gracious daughter had,
Who guessed my birth, and offered me her heart.
Her haughty father bade me quick depart;
With horse and arms he furnished me. I'm here
T' enlist myself as Chinese volunteer;
I hope to serve the Son of Moon and Stars
In some crack regiment of Light Hussars.
But what's the meaning of the crowds that flood
Each caravanserah? Refused I stood
By all, till in yon house I found, at least
Accommodation for myself and beast.

BARAK.

In that trim cottage lives my wife. 'Tis lucky
She proved herself in house-letting so plucky.

KALAF.

I give you joy, old friend; you're married snugly,
Your wife (for a Chinese) is not so ugly,
And kind as kind can be, though somewhat droll,
Adieu,—I'll through the city take a stroll.
And then proceed to visit the great Khan,
And beg him to engage me as his man.

BARAK.

Stay, Prince, how rash!—you do not know your danger:
'Tis evident to Peking you're a stranger.
To-day a horrid deed will be enacted,—
A cruel death, by Turandot exacted.
Have you not heard that Turandot the fair
Has filled this land with bloodshed and despair?

KALAF.

'Tis true I heard, in distant Keicobad,
Accounts of Turandot, so strange, so sad,
That I believed them false,—exaggerated.
'Twas said the Prince of Keicobad, ill-fated,
Had met his death by Turandot's command;

His father, in revenge, assailed this land,
But lost his life; my patroness, his daughter,
By chance escaped unhurt the gen'ral slaughter,
And slave was made to haughty Turandot:
All this I heard, but credited it not.

BARAK.

Too true is all you've heard through common rumour,
The Princess Turandot's ferocious humour
Has many princes caused to lose their life
In seeking to obtain her as a wife.
Her beauty is so wonderful, that all
As willing victims to her mandate fall;
In vain do various painters daily vie
To limn her rosy cheek, her flashing eye,
Her perfect form, and noble, easy grace,
Her flowing ebon locks and radiant face.
Her charms defy all portraiture: no hand
Can reproduce her air of sweet command.
Yet e'en such counterfeits, from foreign parts
Attract fresh suitors,—win all hearts.
But she, whose outward semblance thus appears
To be Love's temple, such fierce hatred bears
To all marital sway, or marriage tie,
That rather than submit to man, she'd die.
Great kings and princes, all have sued in vain,
One glance of love or pity to obtain.

KALAF.

In Keicobad I heard this oft-told tale,
But thought it paradoxical—and stale.

BARAK.

'Tis true. Her poor old father's in despair,
For China's throne is now without an heir;
He longs for her to wed some prince or other,
And not perplex him with continual bother.
He's of an age to live in peace and quiet,
And not be plagued with wars and civil riot;
He's tried all means his daughter's mind to soften,
Has often sternly threatened—coaxed as often;
Used prayers for such a monarch *infra dig*—
But all in vain; she's headstrong as a pig.
At length she said she'd make a compromise,
The Khan consented—(he's not over-wise!)
His artful daughter wheedled him to swear,
By great Fo-hi, that she should never wear
The hateful Hymeneal yoke, unless
Some suitor for her hand should rightly guess
Three difficult conundrums by herself composed:
But if the man who for her hand proposed
Should fail to solve her problems—then his pate
Should be struck off, and grace the city-gate.

KALAF.

Why, what a tigress must this Princess be!
I never heard such cruelty—Bless me!

BARAK.

Already kings and princes by the dozen
She's managed by her subtlety to cozen;
For she's so clever that she always diddles
The keenest wits by her confounding riddles.

KALAF.

As wife, decidedly I should decline her,
She's made of dragon-pattern stony China.
What fools her suitors are, their hearts to fix on
So termagant and bloodthirsty a vixen!

BARAK.

So fascinating is she, none withstand her,
All men for her do nothing but philander.
Behold on yonder gate the ghastly row
Of livid heads set up in dismal show.
All these belonged to men who dared to hope
With Turandot in subtlety to cope.
To-day a prince is led to execution,
Who failed to give her riddles due solution.
That is the reason of the noise you hear,
Pray go not to the town.

KALAF.

What should I fear?

BARAK.

The bloody spectacle your nerves might shake;
The severed head is fastened to a stake.

(Gong sounds within the city walls.)

But hark! yon tantan's loud infernal dinning,
Tells that the tragedy is now beginning.

KALAF.

A monster like this princess should be strangled,
Her body by wild horses torn and mangled.

BARAK.

To all she is not cruelly inclined,
'Tis Man she hates; to women she's most kind.
Within her royal hareem serves my wife,
And with her mistress leads a happy life.
The only fault of Turandot is pride,—
Her many virtues cannot be denied.

KALAF.

Who comes this way?

BARAK.

'Tis Ishmael, the friend
Of him who just has met his tragic end.

Enter ISHMAEL, weeping.

ISH.

His life is o'er! Ah, would the cruel knife
Had struck my worthless self, and spared his life.

BARAK.

Bear up, good friend, I pity you sincerely,
Your master for his love has paid too dearly.
Why did you not dissuade him from the trial—

ISH.

My prayers he met with kind, but firm denial.
His dying words still echo in mine ear—
"Good friend," he said, "to die I do not fear;
My life's a blank if without *her* I live.
Speed to my father,—beg him to forgive
His hapless son, who staked his life on one
Whose face is fair, whose heart is cold as stone.
Shew him this portrait: (*takes a miniature from his
breast*) when its charms he views,
My frenzied love, my rashness he'll excuse."
This said, he clasped the portrait to his breast,
Fond kisses on its icy beauty pressed;
Then bent his head, and closed his eyes,
The death blow fell, and sent him to the skies.

(*Dashes the portrait to the ground.*)

Away, thou false deceit! thou cause of woe,
Th' original I'd trample even so.
To dust I'd grind her tiger heart;—her soul,
I'd send to Eblis' region dark and foul! (*Exit.*)

BARAK.

Are you convinced?

KALAF.

I'm perfectly amazed.
How can a painted semblance thus have crazed
So sensible a prince? (*Stoops to pick it up.*)

BARAK.

For heaven's sake,
Avoid that picture as you would a snake.

KALAF (*smiling*).

No harm will happen, dear old tutor, sure
From picking up a picture from the floor.
No woman yet has caused my heart to throb,—
Shall painted lines my soul of freedom rob?

(*Barak endeavours to prevent Kalaf from beholding
the miniature; Kalaf puts him aside, and gazes
on it for some time in silence.*)

Ye gods! an angel's face. Oh ecstasy!

BARAK.

Now, there; he's caught. I knew how it would be!

KALAF.

Beneath this beaming smile, these lustrous eyes,

There cannot lurk a cruel heart of ice.

BARAK.

I tell you she's the wickedest of creatures;
Oh, gaze not on the Syren's fatal features,
More baneful than the Gorgon head, Medusa.

KALAF.

Hush, hush, I will not hear you thus abuse her,
I never saw a face and form diviner;
Her's is not mortal clay, but porcelain China,
Some magic power, some demon, I know not,
Enchains my soul to beauteous Turandot.

(Gazes enraptured on the miniature.)

These eyes to meet, these rosy lips to kiss,
Who would not hazard all to win such bliss?
My senses reel, my veins are all afire!
Good Barak, help me to my heart's desire.
Her stern ordeal I'll undergo—to solve
Her problems or to die, is my resolve.

BARAK.

Desist from your intention, I conjure you,
Let my remonstrance of this madness cure you.

KALAF.

You speak in vain. My fortune now or never,
Shall be ensured for aye, or lost for ever.
One stroke will end my life, or I shall gain
The fairest woman e'er beheld, and reign
An Emperor of Chang's celestial state.
O smile upon my hopes, benignant Fate!

(During this speech, a Chinese executioner has appeared on the city gate, bearing a pole upon which is fixed a turbaned head: he places it in the row, and disappears.)

But tell me, Barak, shall I in divan
Behold the lovely daughter of the Khan?

BARAK.

A spectacle more thrilling now behold,
That head just smitten off. My blood runs cold,
To think that yours may be thus closely shaven.

KALAF.

Nay, fear is not for princes—I'm no craven.

(Contemplates the head with compassion.)

Poor youth, deserving of a better fate.

BARAK.

Sweet prince, renounce th' attempt.

KALAF.

Too late, too late!

BARAK.

I fear you'll fail to guess the Sphinx's riddles.

KALAF.

I'll cut the Gordian knots right down their middles!
I'm not so stupid as some folks suppose;
'Twill not be easy my quick wit to pose.
I fancy I shall come off with *éclat*;
But if I fail, it does not matter, pshaw!
If in this enterprise I lose my life,
Present my compliments to your good wife;
My horse be hers, in payment of her trouble.
Heigho! this world's a dream, and life's a bubble!

(Going. Enter SKIRINA from the cottage.)

Reveal my name to none. Nay, do not cry,
You've wept me once before as dead. Goodbye.

SKIR.

Why, what's the matter? You are melancholy.

BARAK.

Oh, help me, wife, restrain this youth's mad folly;
He's off to Peking—means to dare the Sphinx!

SKIR.

He's sure to die—my heart within me sinks!
What put such silly nonsense in your head?
You've got brain fever; bless you, go to bed.

KALAF.

Pray save your breath. My fever needs no nurse
But Turandot's fair hand. Here, take my purse,
I have no farther need of money; for
I either die, or shall become an Emperor.

(Exit hastily into the city gate.)

BARAK *(following him)*.

Dear master, hear me; stay; all, all in vain;
I ne'er shall see his blessed face again!

SKIR.

You know my stranger-guest? how very funny,
Let's try to catch him, and return his money.

BARAK.

Wife, be not curious; no questions ask,
He's gifted with such mental powers, the task
Of coping with the Sphinx he may achieve—

His doom unto the gods we now must leave.

SKIR.

We'll sacrifice a pig to great Fo-hi,
He'll perhaps contrive your handsome friend shan't die.

(Exeunt into the cottage.)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE.—*Grand saloon of the Divan. L. Doors leading to the Emperor's apartment. R. Doors leading to TURANDOT's Harem. Black slaves discovered, engaged in setting the saloon in order; TRUFFALDIN majestically directing them.*

TRUF.

Come, look alive! His Majesty's Divan
Will soon assemble. Now, look sharp, my man!
A carpet for this throne; here sits her Highness;
Bring brooms, and sweep up all this horrid dry mess.

(Enter BRIGHELLA, looking around wonderingly.)

BRIG.

I say, Truffaldin, what's this grand array?
The high Divan again—twice in one day?

TRUF. *(without minding him).*

Eight seats here for the doctors!
They're all muffs,
But look imposing in their brocade stuffs.

BRIG.

Truffaldin, do you hear? What is the matter?

TRUF.

How dare you make such a confounded clatter?
You stupid, don't you know the whole Divan
Are called to meet as quickly as they can?
Another suitor for my mistress' heart
Is anxious from his silly head to part.

BRIG.

For shame! Three hours ago one victim fell.

TRUF.

This new pretender seems a precious swell.
His curly poll will grace the hangman's pole,
A charming barber's block, upon my soul!
'Twill cut a figure in our "*Rotten Row*;"
I think that jest is witty—Ho, ho, ho!

BRIG.

Your soul in blackness with your visage vies—
You grin whene'er a fellow-creature dies.

TRUF.

You jackanapes! None of your paltry spite;
My heart's not black,—your liver 'tis that's white;
So hold your jaw. Why should I grieve to see
That men for love such arrant fools can be?
The more the merrier; for on each day,
Our Princess 'scapes a husband's dreaded sway;
She gives us all a good jollification,
Besides munificent gratification.

BRIG.

How barbarous.

TRUF.

Now, don't you be so silly.
Her suitors are not dragged here willy-nilly;
They know the journey here their heads may cost 'em,
But 'tis no loss; for they've already lost 'em.
Perhaps that's why the riddles they can't guess,
And always fall into a hideous mess.
I'm sure my charming mistress is most lenient
To have devised a method so convenient
To rid herself, and China, of such geese;
Much harder tasks,—to fetch the golden fleece—
Or singing water—or the talking bird—
Were formerly exacted, as I've heard.
My lovely Highness is not so inhuman,
She only tests her sweethearts' fine acumen;
And if she must submit to husband's rule,
At least she'll not be governed by a fool.

(March music is heard.)

BRIG.

The royal trumpets sound. Hark, don't you hear 'em.

TRUF.

I'll run t'escort my Princess from her hareem.
Be off! and guard the palace portals,
Let none pass thro' but Mandarin-born mortals.

(Exeunt severally.)

(Enter guards and musicians; then eight doctors pedantically dressed; PANTALOON and TARTAGLIA in characteristic costumes; then the KHAN ALTOUM, in extravagantly rich attire, he ascends his throne, PANT. and TART. station themselves near it. At his entrance, all prostrate themselves, their foreheads to the ground, and remain

thus until he is seated. At a sign from PANTALOON, the march ceases.)

ALT.

Good folk, behold your monarch much perplexed,

I must confess I'm seriously vexed.
My daughter's obstinacy quite unnerves me,
Such unforeseen and jadish tricks she serves me.
One charming prince was killed this morn, at six;
Another's just arrived,—I'm in a fix,
And worried to death by constant butch'ry,
Of lovers caught by my fair daughter's witch'ry;
But yet I cannot break my oath. Fo-hi
Has heard my vow; his wrath I dar'n't defy.
Prime Minister, can't you some project form
And be your monarch's rudder thro' this storm?

PANT.

Celestial Majesty—

ALT.

What do you say?

PANT. (*aside.*)

The loudest bawling's all time thrown away!
He's deaf as any post—a perfect dummy—
It's no use preaching wisdom to a mummy.
I wish I were in Venice back again!
I had to fly her happy shores, on pain
Of being hanged, or losing liberty,
Because the bigwigs thought my tongue too free.
I hoped, as minister, I was secure
To fatten in an easy sinecure;
Instead of which, I've not one moment's leisure;
No carnival, nor any Christian pleasure.
But constant squabbles, tears, and imprecations,
Divans, beheadings, sphinxes,—I've lost patience!
I'll quit this land of pigtails, gongs, and teas;
Return to Italy, and live at ease.

ALT.

I see you're talking; speak a little louder.

PANT. (*aside.*)

He wouldn't hear the bursting of gunpowder.

ALT.

Tartaglia, have you seen this poor young fellow?

TART. (*stammering, until he speaks Italian very glibly*)—

Y-y-your h-hi-high-ness, y-y-es, a-and f-f-found h-hi-him—*molto bello.*

ALT.

What do you say?

TART.

S-so p-p-please y-your M-majesty,
(*aside*) *Non posso più! che sordo! sapresty!*

ALT.

Then bring this suitor to divan at once. (*Exit guards.*)
We'll urge him the hard trial to renounce.

PANT.

I'll try my best;

ALT.

What do you say?

PANT. (*aside.*)

But fear
He'll be as deaf as you, and will not hear.

(*Enter KALAF, with guards. He kneels before the Khan, with his hands to his forehead. ALTOUM regards him with pity.*)

ALT.

Arise, rash man.
(*Aside.*) Ah, what a gallant youth,
Behead him? 'Twould be quite a shame, in sooth.
(*aloud*) Say, who art thou? From what far distant land
Dost come to seek in marriage that fair hand
Which only royal blood may justly claim?

KAL.

Great Khan, permit me to conceal my name;
My lineage justifies my bold desire.

PANT.

I'm sure he's nobly born and nurtured, sire.

ALT.

What do you say?

PANT. (*despairingly.*)

It doesn't signify.

ALT.

'Twould break my aged heart to see thee die.
I'd save thy life if possible. Oh, quit
The sharp encounter with my child's keen wit.
My heart and eyes are sickened by the blood
That's daily shed.

KAL.

Your Majesty's too good.

ALT.

I'm captivated by thy noble air;
With thee my royal throne I'll gladly share.
So thou but force me not to take thy life;
Avoid the fatal Sphinx—give up the strife.

KAL.

My thanks are all I have, and these I give;
But without Turandot I will not live.
My motto is, "Or death, or Turandot."

PANT. (*aside.*)

He really is a most pig-headed sot!
(*aloud*) Young man, you cannot know the risk you run.
Th' alternative's in earnest—not in fun.
Dame Turandot will spin you a tough riddle,
That's not to be "got thro' like any fiddle."
Not such as this, which any child might guess—
(Though the Emperor could not, I must confess;)
"What gives a cold, cures a cold, and pays the doctor's bill?"
Not short enigmas lightly disentangled;
Hard nuts you'll have to crack, fresh made, new-fangled;
And if you cannot guess them all *instantly*,
Your head will be struck off—I do not banter.
You'll have to answer rightly in a twink;
Your head once off, you'll have no time to think.

KAL.

Your warning's vain: "Or death or Turandot."

PANT. (*aside.*)

For all my sermon he don't care one jot.

TART.

D-d-dear s-sir, l-let m-me p-persuade you. *Laschi stare*
Th-this d-dr-dread-f-ful st-str-strife, *bruttissimo affare.*

KAL.

Again I say, "Or death, or Turandot."

TART.

H-he-he's ho-hope-l-l-less-l-ly in l-lo-love. *L'è proprio cot.*

ALT.

As no persuasion moves this headstrong man,
Go, summon Turandot to this divan.

(*Exit guards.*)

(KALAF, *violently agitated, gazes towards the harem entrance.*)

KAL.

She comes—her beauty will enchant my sight,
Ye Gods, inspire my mind with sapient might!

(March heard. Enter TRUFFALDIN, with his drawn sabre on his shoulder. Black male and female slaves, beating tantans and cymbals. ADELMA, in Tartar costume, and SKIRINA, both veiled. ADELMA carries a salver upon which are sealed papers. TRUFFALDIN and male slaves prostrate themselves as they pass ALTOUM'S throne; the female slaves kneel, with their hands to their forehead. Then appears TURANDOT, veiled, in rich Chinese costume. The courtiers and doctors prostrate themselves before her. ALTOUM rises; the Princess makes him a slight inclination, with her hands to her forehead, then ascends the throne, and seats herself; ADELMA and SKIRINA on either side, the former nearest the audience. TRUFFALDIN takes the salver from ADELMA, and with exaggerated ceremony, distributes the papers to the eight doctors, and resumes his place. March ceases.)

TUR. *(haughtily.)*

Once more a vain aspirant for my hand,
Compels me here before you all to stand.
This rash intruder, who thus fondly thinks
To overcome in wit the Chinese Sphinx,
Must little prize his life. His downfall's sore.

ALT.

There stands the man. Now don't be so demure.
He's young and handsome, do have some compassion,
Don't doubly kill him, in your usual fashion.
Accept him as your husband, my sweet daughter,
Don't keep us any longer in hot water.

TUR. *(after gazing at KALAF, aside to SKIRINA)—*

Skirina, what can ail me? Heigho! surely
This can't be love—I feel so faint—quite poorly.
No man has ever touched my heart—but now
For this sweet youth I feel—I don't know how.
In all my life I never felt so queer.

SKIR.

At last you've fall'n in love; that's very clear.
So much the better! make your riddles plain.
And then he needn't puzzle his poor brain.

TUR.

Nay, peace, Skirina, recollect my glory.

(ADELMA has observed KALAF with emotion.)

ADELMA.

'Tis he! my former slave. I guessed his story.
My heart was right, he's one of noble birth.

TUR.

Young prince, I clearly recognise your worth.
Be wise in time. Relinquish your attempt.
Too arduous is the trial. Do not tempt
The Fates. I am not cruel, as they say,
But shun the yoke of Man's despotic sway.

In virgin freedom would I live and die;
The meanest hind may claim this boon,—shall I,
The daughter of an emperor, not have
That birthright which belongs to all? Be slave
To brutish force, that makes your sex our lord?
Why does my hand such tempting bait afford?
The gods have made me beauteous, rich, and wise,
Presumptuous man considers me his prize.
If nature dowered me with bounteous treasure
You tyrants think 'twas all to serve your pleasure.
Why should my person, throne, and wealth be booty
To one harsh, jealous master? No, all beauty
Is heaven's gift, and like the sun, should shine
To glad earth's children, and their souls refine.
I hate proud man, and like to make him feel
He may not crush free woman 'neath his heel.

KAL.

Such high-souled sentiments, so fine a mind,
Transcendent grace and beauty, all combin'd
Must justify my love and seeming boldness.
I ne'er accused you of disdain or coldness.
I duly honour maidenly reserve.—
Your favour I pretend not to deserve;
But who would not risk all, with blindfold eyes,—
To win a heaven on earth,—a Paradise?
Each day do we not see, for smaller gain,
Great captains brave the dangers of the main?
For glory's empty bubble thousands perish,
Above all treasures your fair hand I cherish;
Your heart and not your throne, is my desire;
Condemn me not if madly I aspire.

SKIR. (*aside to Turandot.*)

For Fo-hi's sake! three easy riddles give,
Don't let him die, but as your husband live.

ADELMA.

How noble are his words! Ah, had my sire
But known he was a prince. My heart's desire
I'll yet obtain; I'll save him by some plot,
He ne'er shall wed the hateful Turandot.
(*to Turandot.*) Princess, you're agitated; calm your nerves,
And treat him with contempt as he deserves.

TUR.

You're right, Adelma; thanks for your kind zeal;
He's woman's foe; no pity must I feel.
(*to Kalaf.*) Prepare then, arrogant young man.—

ALT.

Dear prince,
May not our Royal words your ear convince?

KAL.

I still repeat: "Or death or Turandot!"

PANT. (*aside.*)

My poor young man, you'll surely go to pot!

ALT.

Then read the awful mandate.

SKIR.

How I tremble.

ADELMA.

My jealousy I scarcely can dissemble.

(PANTALON *receives the Doomsday Book, first prostrating Himself before it; then reads in a loud voice:*)—"By command of his Celestial Majesty, the Son of the Moon, cousin to the planets, and near relative to the firmament in general,—oyes! oyes! oyes!" (*Rings crier's bell.*) (*Aside.*) If I said what I liked, I should say, oh no! oh no! oh no! (*Aloud.*) "Any person of royal descent may sue for the hand of our daughter, Empress Turandot, on the following conditions:—The Princess shall propound three riddles to any suitor proposing himself as her husband; should he be unable to unravel them, his head shall be struck off with an axe, and exposed on the city-gate of Peking; should he unravel them, the Empress Turandot shall become his lawful bride, and together they shall inherit the throne of the celestial empire. We swear it by our ancestor, the sun."

ALT. (*placing his hands on the book*)—

This law, tho' it cause tears and blood to flow,
I've sworn to keep, alas! it must be so.

TUR. (*rises and declaims*)—

A tree on which men grow and fade;
Old as the world, yet ever new;
Its leaves, on one side, live in shade,
On th' other bears the sun's bright show.
Each time it blooms a ring it wears,
It tells the age of each event.
Upon its bark men's names it bears,
Forgotten e'er its life be spent.
What is this tree, so young, so old,
So sunny warm, so icy cold?

KALAF. (*ponders awhile, then bows to the Princess*)—

Too happy is your slave, divine Princess,
If nothing harder he may have to guess;
This ancient tree which ever buds anew,
Which sun and shade, man's age and deeds doth shew,
It is "a year," revolving day and night.

PANT. (*joyfully.*)

Shake hands, Tartaglia, I'm quite sure he's right!

TART.

A-a-as-ass-tounding! *Sono contentissimo!*

DOCTORS (*having opened the papers.*)

Eureka! Optime! Optissimo!

(Flourish of gongs and cymbals.)

ALT. *(graciously.)*

Fo-hi protects thee, son; He'll save thy life.

ADELMA *(aside.)*

Ye gods, let not my rival be his wife,
Though I rejoice her vanity is vexed.

SKIR.

I hope he'll be as clever at the next!

TUR.

Shall he outwit me? No, by sun and moon;
(to KALAF.) Your joy's precocious—triumph not too soon.

(Rises and declaims)—

Canst thou the fragile mirror name,
Reflecting all creation on its limpid face;
'Tis closed within a narrow frame,
Yet compasses high heav'n's blue vault of endless space.
This crystal is of priceless worth,
But yet the poor possess it, nor possession pay;
It is the brightest gem on earth,
It gives and yet receives its heaven-born brilliant ray.
What is this mirror bright and clear,
Free given to all, to all so dear?

KALAF *(ponders, then bows to the Princess).*

Your mystery's not hard to penetrate;
The mirror you describe so small, so great,
So priceless, so benign, "the eye" must be,
A heaven 'twill show if thine speak love to me.

PANT. *(embraces TART.)*

He's shot the bull's-eye through the very middle.

SKIR.

I never knew his equal at a riddle.

DOCTORS *(having opened the papers).*

Eureka! Optime! Optissimo!

(Flourish of gongs and cymbals.)

TART.

Bravo-o-o! Bravissimo! Benissimo!

ALT.

I give you joy; you *are* a clever fellow!

PANT.

Our Chinese Sphinx with rage is turning yellow.

ADELMA.

In vain the Fates themselves would seek to foil me;
My rival shall not of my love despoil me.

SKIR.

I wish to Fo-hi all was fairly over!

ADEL. (*to Turandot.*)

If you be mocked by this conceited lover,
Your former victories will naught avail;
Your honour's lost if this pert fop prevail.

TUR.

The world shall perish first! Exultant fool!
My hate increases with thy hope to rule.
Escape my wrath whilst yet thy life is free,
My vengeance dread, and from the contest flee.

KAL.

Your hate alone, adored Princess, can move
My soul. If vainly I implore your love,
Then let me die; my life I do not prize
If loathsome I appear in your sweet eyes.

ALT.

Hear reason, Prince, nor longer tempt the gods.
Throw up the game,—too fearful are the odds.
With honour canst thou quit this high divan,
For thou'st done more than any other man.
Yet two successes serve not, though they're glorious,
Unless for the third time thou be victorious.
And thou, my domineering, wilful child,
Wilt not relent towards this youth? Be mild,
And graciously accept his suit.

TUR.

Relent!
I scorn his love,—his pity I resent.
The law prescribes three trials. Let's proceed,
And try if in the third he may succeed.

KAL.

The gods decide! "Or death or Turandot!"

TUR. (*angrily.*)

Death—death will be your well-deserved lot.

PANT.

Keep silence in the court! Ahem! ahem!
(*aside*) Now for some crackjaw, mystic apophthegm.

TUR. (*rises and declaims*)—

What is that thing, held cheap as dust,
Yet honor'd by the Emperor's hand?
'Tis made to pierce, with sword's keen thrust,
But sheds no blood, tho' wounds like sand,
In number deep inflicts; robs none;
Enriches thousands; rules the earth;
Makes life with ease and smoothness run;
Has founded kingdoms; ended dearth;
Most ancient cities it has built,
But ne'er caused war, nor war's sad guilt.
Answer my question (*unveils*). Look me in the face,
Avow you're vanquished and deserve disgrace.

KAL. (*gazes on her with rapture.*)

Refulgent loveliness! Ecstatic bliss!

PANT. (*shaking him.*)

Collect your senses! Don't take on like this!

ALT.

Alas, I fear his intellect is puzzled;
He's mute,—his tongue seems tied,—his lips tight muzzled.

PANT.

Were't not for dignity, into the kitchen,
I'd rush a glass of something short to fetch 'un.

TUR. (*who has returned KALAF'S. fixed gaze*)—

Unhappy wretch! thou'rt silent; thou must die.

KAL. (*recovers himself, and bows to TURANDOT with extreme composure*)

'Twas but your beauty dazed my wondering eye.
My mind can grasp the meaning of the Sphinx,
Tho' it's as puzzling as the "Babe of Ginx."
The iron thing which wounds yet sheds no blood;
That rules the earth, and gives man wealth and food;
On which each year the Khan doth place his hand,
To typify his reign o'er China's land;
In short, the instrument your riddle mentions
Is one of mankind's earliest inventions.
If I mistake not, Hm—ha—Let me see!
"The plough" is meant by Riddle Number three.

DOCTORS (*having opened the papers.*)

Eureka! Optime! Optissimo!

(*Flourish of gongs and cymbals.*)

PANT.

I kiss our future Emperor's great toe!

TART.

Th-the S-sp-sphinx is v-van-qui-quished—*Vinto è il Demonio!*

Sh-she's f-fou-found her m-ma-match. *Evviva il matrimonio!*

(TURANDOT *faints*, ADELMA *and* SKIRINA *support her*. ALTOUM *leaning on* PANT. *and* TART. *descends his throne, and embraces* KALAF. *The DOCTORS quit their seats, and retire to the background.*)

ALT.

Sweet prince, our son-in-law thou'lt be to-morrow,
A joyful climax to our royal sorrow.

TUR. (*recovers her senses, and rashes wildly between* ALTOUM *and* KALAF)—

Oh, make me not his slave! 'Twill drive me mad,
My mind no time for due reflection had.
Too easily his triumph was obtained.

ALT.

The hard-won victory he fairly gained.
With gratitude become this good youth's wife,
Obey the law, and end this weary strife.

TUR.

Once more call the divan—renew the contest,
If I have time for thought, I'm sure of conquest.

PANT.

Fair Princess Tigerheart, that's *rather* cool;
Don't make his Majesty act like a fool.
D'you think the royal head of your kind Daddy
Is lined with lead, like a Japan tea-caddy;
What say you, colleague; and ye Doctors wise?

(*Doctors join hands in a circle, nodding their chins.*)

DOCTORS.

Let bloodshed cease. The chopped-off heads suffice.

ALT.

To great Fo-hi's pagoda we'll repair
And finish off this hymeneal affair.

TUR.

Have mercy—

ALT.

Mercy hast thou shewn to none,
I've kept my oath; do thou as I have done.
Fulfil Fo-hi's decree.

TUR.

Oh, spare me, Sire,
Or at your feet behold your child expire.

(*Throws herself at his feet.*)

ALT.

Thy marriage is ordained. Proud girl, obey,
Too long I've bowed to thy capricious sway.
Entreat no more. I swear by Fo-hi's sword.

TUR.

Hold, father, do not speak the sacred word.
This overbearing tyrant I'll not wed;
I'd rather make the sullen grave my bed.

KAL. (*to TURANDOT.*)

Abate your terror; nor so madly grieve;
I'll intercede myself for your reprieve.
Fair cruel one, who may your tears withstand?

(*to ALTOUM.*) Great monarch, grant her wish; I'd win her hand
By love's sweet power; not by enforced consent.

(*to TURANDOT.*) I see thou crav'st my head—then be content.
I love thee so intensely, that my life
Is worthless if I may not call thee wife.
Again a solemn test I'll undergo.

ALT.

She's yours by right of law. Fate willed it so.

TUR.

You shall not drag me to the bridal altar;
This hand shall slay me first (*draws a dagger.*) It will not falter.

KAL.

Stay, hold your hand, and calm your poignant sorrow;
We'll meet again in high divan. To-morrow
The Chinese Sphinx this problem shall unravel:
"Who is that Prince who, after weary travel
Escaped from slavedom's thrall, and reached the goal
And blissful summit of his longing soul;
Yet at fulfilment of his heart's desire
Was plunged yet deeper into tortures dire?"
Relentless beauty, if you name aright
The name and lineage of this luckless wight
Then shall you gratify your hate, and take
My life. But if you fail, then shall you make
Me blessed, by giving me your hand. Decide.

TUR.

By this new compact I consent to abide.

ALT.

Imprudent youth, too generously kind,
Thou know'st not her all-penetrating mind.
But, should she conquer thee by female wile,
Thou shalt not fall a victim to her guile.
To-morrow's high divan shall seal her fate;
Her wit may free her; or she'll be thy mate.
Enough of blood's been shed.

TUR. (*aside.*)

My subtle art
Shall crush his pride. Be firm, fond, wav'ring heart.

(*March strikes up. ALTOUM, leaning on KALAF's shoulder, followed by PANT., TART., DOCTORS, and Courtiers, exeunt L. TURANDOT, ADELMA, SKIRINA, TRUFFALDIN, and slaves, exeunt R.*)

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*Street in Peking. (Enter KALAF and BARAK.)*

KALAF.

None know my name in Peking's busy town,
Your trusty tongue's as secret as my own;
E'en to your wife I hope you've not revealed—

BARAK.

From her especially the truth's concealed.

KALAF.

For many years, as dead I've been, given o'er.
No mortal here has seen my face before.
Fear not.

BARAK.

Dear Prince, forgive me if I blame you,
I can't help dreading lest the Sphinx may name you.
You were not wise to give her this last chance;
She's so astute! She'll lead you a fine dance.
You had possession—nine points of the law,
Why should you for her meagrim's care one straw?

KALAF.

Oh, had you seen her grief.

BARAK.

I needs must smile
To think the tears of this sly crocodile
Should take you in!

KAL.

Perhaps my tender love

Her heart to mutual tenderness may move.

BAR.

No gratitude you'll get from that proud snake.

KAL.

Reville her not!

BAR.

I for your safety quake.
She's quite as cunning as she's fierce.
Her eyes can even through a millstone pierce.

KAL.

Nay, hope the best. My lucky stars preside,
They'll crown me victor of my lovely bride.

BAR.

You're just the same dear, sanguine, thoughtless boy
As ever. I can't bear to spoil your joy.

(Enter BRIGHELLA, marching backwards, commanding a few Chinese guards; PANT. and TART.)

BRIG.

Halt! Pigtailed, right! Attention! Royal Black Guards!
(aside.) How I do hate this dangerous marching backwards!

PANT.

Oh, here he is! At last we've caught our bird.
Prince, how d'ye do! Allow me just one word.
But who's this man? *(points to BARAK.)*
Of what has he been talking?

BAR. *(aside.)*

I hope they don't suspect—*(aloud.)* As I was walking,
This man accosted me (I do not know him),
He asked if I his way would kindly show him.

PANT.

Great Prince, you're compassed round about with traps.
If we don't keep you in our eye—perhaps
The Sphinx may have you murdered. To prevent
Unpleasant little accidents we're sent
By his celestial Majesty, to take you
In our safe custody. We'll not forsake you.
(to BARAK.) And you're her spy, I do believe; get out!
And mind your own affairs, Sir Pry-about.
(to KALAF.) As Minister, I hope I may make bold
To say "Sweet Prince, take care you are not sold."
Pray whisper not your name to any one
Except to me, your friend. I'll blab to none.
On my discretion you may safe repose,
Confide in me; your name I'll not disclose.
No more than I would jump right o'er the moon.

KAL.

No doubt; but yet my name, good *Pantaloön*,
Like yours, must be quite "inexpressible."

PANT.

My wish to please is irrepressible.
Command me, pray. Henceforth I will be dumb.
The watchword is,—I understand you,—"Mum!"

TART.

G-go-ood Pr-prince, d-don't m-mi-mind th-that st-stu-pid P-pa-pantaioon,
H-he's n-nothing b-but a g-go-gossiping B-buff-ffoon.
C-co-conf-fi-fide in m-me. Your s-se-secret I won't u-u-ut-ter,
I-in f-f-fact I c-ca-*can't*, 'c-ca-cause of my d-de-deuced s-st-stutter.

PANT.

Your Highness! to the palace, if you please.

(*Signs to BRIGHELLA.*)

BRIG.

Recover, Pigtails! Black Guards, stand at ease!

(*Exeunt KALAF, PANT., and TART., Guards and BRIGHELLA.*)

BARAK, (*who has been watching in the background, comes forward.*)

Ye Tartar deities, watch o'er his life!
Good gracious, what can hither bring my wife?

(*Enter SKIRINA.*)

Where art thou going, wife, in such a hurry?

SKIR.

Oh, dearest husband, I'm all in a flurry.
Our handsome guest will be Chang's future
Who'd have believed such an astounding thing?
The Princess Turandot is in despair;
She weeps, she wrings her hands, she tears her hair.
She'll kill herself if she can't tell to-morrow
The name of your young friend. To calm her sorrow,
I bade her not torment herself, for you
Knew all about him, and his father too.

BAR.

Unhappy woman, thou hast ruined us!

SKIR.

Why, what harm's done? Why make you such a fuss?

BAR.

My head will have to answer for thy tongue.

SKIR.

Oh, nonsense, dear; I'm sure I've done no wrong.

(Enter TRUFFALDIN and slaves.)

BAR.

Behold what thou hast done, thou Chatterbox.

(TRUFFALDIN, with pompous exaggerated ferocity, holds his sabre to BARAK's breast.)

TRUF.

Make no resistance! Yield thee, sly old fox!

SKIR.

Have mercy, Truffaldin,—my husband spare!

TRUF.

Of his bald head I'll not disturb one hair.
Good female, you're of the fem'nine gender,
And therefore towards your weakness my heart's tender.
Your husband shall not come to any harm,
So pray don't needlessly yourself alarm.
The highest honour is in store for him,
Free entrance's offered to our Harem.

BAR.

The gilded trap of the fair Serpent-Sphinx.
She's found me out; she's eyes like any lynx.
There's no escape.

TRUF. *(flourishing his sabre).*

Lead on, my free-born slaves,
To where the flag of slavedom freely waves.

(Exeunt BARAK, TRUF. menacing him, and slaves.)

SKIR.

Forgive me, husband dear. Adieu, adieu!
Oh dear, oh dear, what ever shall I do?
Adelma urged me to my boastful prating—
She always is so very aggravating;
I'd like to drop a lump of deadly *pison*
In her next cup of "best strong-flavoured Hyson."
I do declare my brain's all in a fuddle—
Fo-hi, do help me out of this sad muddle!
I'll sacrifice another guinea-pig,
For mortals, then, I needn't care one fig. *(Exit.)*

SCENE II.—*A vestibule in TURANDOT's Harem. BARAK is fastened to one of its pillars, black mutes, with drawn daggers, stand on each side of him. A large porcelain dish, fitted with golden coins is on a table near him. TURANDOT stands before him in a threatening attitude. (ADELMA beside her.)*

TUR.

Yet hast thou time. Obey my royal pleasure,
And thine shall be this pile of golden treasure.
If not, my slaves shall pierce thy heart. His name
Reveal at once; his parentage proclaim.

BAR.

Your threats are vain; your treasures I despise.
Repent your obstinate resolve. Be wise
And learn, a woman's highest happiness
Is, by her love a worthy man to bless.

TUR.

To preach to me befits thee not. Desist.
My potent will in vain thou wouldst resist.
Seize on him, slaves, and do your work. Forbear
Awhile. Reflect, and save thy life. I swear
By Fo-hi's face, no harm shall touch thy friend
Nor thee, if thou consent to serve my end.

BAR.

Your path's deceitful. Swear by Fo-hi's might
My friend shall call you his e'er morrow's night.
You hesitate—you dare not swear a lie
Before the sacred face of great Fo-hi.

ADELMA.

Presumptuous wretch, dar'st thou our queen defy?
Princess, demur no longer; let him die.

(SKIRINA *rushes in.*)

SKIR.

Hold, Princess; hold; your father is at hand!
(*aside.*) My knees are knocking; I can hardly stand.

ADELMA.

Unlucky chance! To prison with this fellow!

SKIR.

Adelma, hush; you needn't bawl and bellow.

TUR.

In deepest dungeon let him be confin'd.

BAR.

My body you may shackle; not my mind.

SKIR. (*aside to BARAK.*)

Take courage, husband; do not fear their spite;
The pig will save us yet; I tell you it's all right.

(*Mutes hastily conduct BARAK through a secret door; others
remove the dish of gold.*)

TUR.

Adelma, thou'rt my only friend. Advise

My mind distraught 'twixt love and hate. Despise
Me not, but pity me. Some counsel lend.

ADEL.

As force has failed, by craft we'll gain our end.
I have a plan,—I'm sure of its success,
If to the stranger's cell we gain access.

TUR.

Take gold—suborn his guards—the highest meed
I hold as nought if thy new scheme succeed.

ADEL.

Skirina's help I need to work my plot.

SKIR.

I'd let myself be skinned for Turandot.
I wish my service could my husband save.

TUR.

His life be thy reward, thou faithful slave.

(SKIRINA *kisses* TURANDOT'S *hand*.)

ADEL.

Your royal father comes. In me confide.
(*aside*.) Assist me, love, to quell her haughty pride.

(*Exeunt* ADELMA *and* SKIRINA.)

TUR.

What will Adelma's fertile brain devise?
(*after a pause*.) In vain the truth I'd hide from mine own eyes;
My heart is his—irrevocably his.
To be his wife—oh rapture, heavenly bliss!
Yet I must spurn his love. I will not bear
All China's cold contempt; man's scoffing sneer.
What glory would be mine could I but tame
This bragging conqueror. Pronounce his name
In high divan, and chase him from our city,
Abashed and in despair. But yet, with pity
My heart would surely break. Come, virgin pride
And woman's art my shame and grief to hide.
To-day, proud man has made me bear disgrace;
To-morrow I must triumph o'er his race.
But yet—he did not boastfully rejoice—
Rebuke I welcomed from his gentle voice.
How humble was his suit—how mild and good,
How unresentful towards my scornful mood.
Avaunt, ye tender phantasies, avaunt!
I dread the world's disdain—its scoffing taunt.
My people shall not see Turandot fall,
The slave of one means abject slave to all.

(*Enter* ALTOUM, *perusing a scroll*; PANT, *and* TART, *following at*

some distance.)

ALT. (*to himself.*)

The Bey of Tefflis dead? So ends this tyrant!

PANT. (*aside to TART.*)

What makes his Majesty indulge in high rant?

ALT. (*as above.*)

Prince Kalaf, heir to Tartary's high throne,
Is called to fill the Bey's, besides his own.
This scroll informs me Kalaf is the stranger
Who overthrew the Sphinx and 'scaped her danger.
I'm glad to find the Prince is no bad catch,—
My daughter's will be quite a splendid match.

PANT. (*to TART.*)

What is he muttering all to himself,
Just like a miser counting o'er his pelf?
I do believe he's talking in blank verse,
Or reasoning in rhyme, which would be worse.
He's deaf; if he were blind, 't would suit us better,
For then he couldn't read his private letter.

TART. (*to PANT.*)

A s-sp-special Es-taf-fette! *Ci cova gatto!*
S-such m-my-mystery! *Capisco niente affatto.*

(ALT. *places the scroll in his breast, and signs to PANT. and TART. to withdraw, which they do with reluctance.*)

ALT.

My child, the night is far advanced; yet still
Thy restless steps pace through thy hareem chill.
Quite hopeless is thy task; not all the College
Of Doctors could impart the wished-for knowledge.
Thou canst not guess thy 'pponent's name, tho' we
Have fully learned his family history.
He's worthy of thy hand; my wish obey,
Avoid to-morrow's public *exposée*.
Thou'rt sure to fail. For my sake save thy fame,
My soul recoils from witnessing thy shame.

TUR.

I shall not put my father to the blush;
My adversary's arrogance I'll crush.

ALT.

Ah, flatter not thyself. Let one defeat
Suffice; do not the painful scene repeat.

TUR.

The high divan shall judge. Firm as a rock
Is my strong will. His easy task I mock.

ALT.

Has thy keen wit discovered—tell me truth—
The secret of this overtrusting youth?
If so, be gen'rous; let him go in peace;
From further strife and public struggle cease.
Deal gently with this boy of noble race,
Nor wantonly expose him to disgrace.
Thus shalt thou earn all Chang's high admiration.
Thy harsh decree has much estranged the nation.
They tell strange tales about the Chinese Sphinx,
Men's skulls she gnaws—hot human blood she drinks.
Oh, show thyself as modest, tender, duteous,—
More homage this commands than being beauteous.

TUR.

Your mercy, Sire, beseems your hoary age;
Your words might well convert a Grecian sage,
But cannot change my purpose. I'll not bow
My neck to any man: so runs my vow.
In public this pert boy my power defeated,—
In public shall my vengeance be completed.

ALT.

Dear child, paternal love shall condescend
To humbly beg obedience. Do but bend
To my desire, and thou shalt from me learn
The whole of what this stranger may concern.
In public thou shalt triumph—name aloud
Thy foe, in face of an applauding crowd.
But swear, if thus I'm traitor for thy sake
Thou wilt this suitor for thy husband take.
Thy deed will bless thine aged father's days—
Reward a loving heart—win all men's praise.

TUR. (*who has listened with increasing emotion*)—

His words are torture to my wav'ring pride,
How shall I act? How may I best decide?
Adelma shall I trust? Her plot may fail;
Without disgrace a father may prevail.
Down, stubborn soul (*advances towards ALT., then
hesitates*), and yet, beneath Man's yoke
To crouch? No, no, my vow I'll not revoke.

ALT.

Thou'rt touched. Sweet daughter, grant my fond desire.

TUR.

He fears I may succeed and thwart him. Sire,
I'll meet in high divan. My will is steady.

ALT.

Then, if thou fail, the altar shall be ready;
The rite shall be performed with solemn fitness,
While vulgar crowds shall thy confusion witness.
Their scoffing jeers shall be thy wedding hymn;
Thy father stooped in vain; now stoop to him. (*Exit.*)

TUR.

Oh, murder not your child! Adelma, friend,—
Forsake me not. My grief some comfort send;
My only hope's in thee. If great Fo-hi
Withhold success, to-morrow sees me die. (*Exit.*)

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE.—A magnificent apartment, with divers outlets; in the background an oriental couch. The scene is dark. KALAF discovered pacing up and down, BRIGHELLA holding a torch, observing him, and shaking his head.

BRIG.

Just three o'clock! by Kong's pagoda-chimes.
You've paced this floor just twice three hundred times.
Your Highness had much better go to sleep.
You'll have to rise with dawn's first ruddy peep.
I can't watch any more; my eyelids close.

KALAF.

Thou'rt right, Brighella; go to thy repose.

(BRIG. going, returns cautiously.)

BRIG.

One word, your Highness,—when I've left my post,
Don't be astonished if you see a ghost.
You understand? You needn't be afraid;
I daren't say more; my silence is prepaid.
Forewarned, forearmed, you know. To a blind horse
A nod's as good as twenty winks, of course.

KALAF. (*looking about, uneasily.*)

What spectres shall I see? what dreary sprite?

BRIG.

Oh, nothing, (*yawns.*) I'm *so* sleepy, Prince, good night.

(*Going, returns.*)

I hope you are not angry with Brighella—
I'm but a poor, ill-paid, hardworking fellow—
The Emperor has ordered that no fly
Shall enter this apartment—you know why;
But tho' he's king, his daughter really rules.
It's hard to keep one's balance 'twixt two stools!
And what a woman wills, for good or evil.
That must be done, or she will play the devil.

(*Going, returns.*)

Mind, I know nothing. Keyholes may suffice;
If any noise you hear, it's only mice!

(*Exit, winking significantly.*)

KAL.

Good night, and thanks; your hint I comprehend.
Will treachery be used my life to end?
Nay, Turandot's too noble—I'll not fear.
The fateful hour approaches (*opens a casement.*)
Dawn is near,
I'll seek to drown my care in dreamy rest.

(*As he sinks on the couch, a secret door opens, admitting SKIRINA dressed in male attire, a false beard on.*)

SKIR.

My lord.

KALAF. (*starting up.*)

What man is this? Some silly jest.

SKIR.

What, don't you know Skirina? (*takes off the beard.*)
I'm so frightened!
Disguised I've passed your guards, in these clothes tightened.
I've got so much to tell. Your poor old tutor
Is put in chains! Yes, nothing less would suit her.
He's anxious for your life—he begs you'll sign
Your name to show you're safe; just write one line
To pacify him; or he'll all declare;
The Princess Turandot's in such a flare.
I tremble for my husband,—he's demented,
Until you've kindly to his wish consented.
I've brought a tablet—just your name indite
To ease his mind.

KAL. (*takes the tablet.*)

To please him, I will write.

(*Suddenly recollects himself, and looks at her searchingly.*)

Skirina, would'st thou traitress turn? Thy guest I've been.

SKIR. (*aside.*)

I promised I would do my best.
But such reproaches down I cannot gulp,
Not if my mistress beat me to a pulp.
So Miss Adelma may play off her tricks
Herself, (*to KALAF.*) Please don't your eyes thus on me fix.
(*whimpering.*) I should have thought some slight consideration
You would have felt for my sad situation.
If you suspect me.

KAL.

Nay, I'm sure you acted
All out of kindness.

SKIR. (*aside.*)

I shall go distracted.
(*to KALAF.*) My husband waits your news. My leave I'll take;
(*aside.*) Adelma's sharp; but he's as wide awake. (*Exit.*)

KAL.

Brighella warned me well.

(Enter TRUFFALDIN, covered by a long black mantle.)

Another visit!

Nocturnal ghosts abound. Well, friend, what is it?

TRUF.

Your Excellency, news excellent I bring—
You'll hear a wonderfully wondrous thing.

KAL.

Speak on, good vision; I am all attention.

TRUF.

T'explain in plainest words is my intention.
The keeper of the Hareem stands before you!
But that's not here nor there; so I'll not bore you
With all my titles. The Princess Turandot
Right thro' the heart by Cupid's dart is shot!
I would not flatt'ringly your Highness flatter
With mincing terms, nor will I mince the matter.
My mistress is distracted to—distraction
By your attractive personal—attraction.
If truth I speak not, may the high Fo-hi
Grind all my bones to make his next meat-pie!

KAL.

So far, so good; what hast thou more to say?

TRUF.

Be not impatient, Royal Highness, pray.
My mistress is a tiger-cat—(permit
The term; tho' coarse, 'tis graphically fit.)
She gnashes her white teeth with frantic ire,
And raves against you, "Robbers, murder, fire!"
If truth I speak not, may the high Fo-hi
Make mince-meat of me for his sacred pie.

KAL.

No need of oaths. But hast thou not, good keeper,
Some better news to tell a waken'd sleeper?

Truf.

Of course I have. Without circumlocution
I now proceed to instant elocution:
My charming mistress sent me here to beg
You'll trust her with your secret. Her last leg
She's standing on; and in sheer desperation
She'll marry you; but must before the nation
Appear to vanquish you—in mere appearance.
Be quick, and of your secret make a clearance.
Clear up the matter, and I'll then clear out;
My time is precious. Finish off this bout.

KAL.

One thing thou hast forgotten.

TRUF.

What have I?

KAL.

To imprecate thy bones to Fo-bi's pie.
Return to Turandot. Tell her from me
She'll glorious shine in high divan, if she
Benignant prove herself; more true distinction
She'll gain by this, than by my hope's extinction.

(Signs to TRUF. to withdraw.)

TRUF. *(aside.)*

I've only got my trouble for my pain;
I'll never do a kindly act again. *(Exit.)*

KAL.

Come, gentle sleep. Refresh me, balm divine!
Take courage, weary soul, success may yet be mine.

(Retires to the couch, and sinks; into slumber. Enter ADELMA, veiled, bearing a lighted taper.)

ADEL.

I shall not fail. In vain was their endeavour,
But I will venture all, the knot to sever.
I may not learn his name,—but I'll implore
His flight from Peking. Then my love, once more
May hope to win his heart.

(Unveils, and gazes upon him.)

He gently slumbers:
Reluctantly I rouse him, but time numbers
The hours yet left for action. Prince, arise!

KAL.

Who calls? Another spirit! Do my eyes
Deceive me? Can it be? Adelma here?
Thy royal person in a slave's mean gear!
Such lowly garb is surely some disguise.

ADEL.

No, Prince; Adelma now in slav'ry sighs.
Beneath the galling yoke of her who martyred
My wretched brother, and my father slaughtered.
Not you alone must suffer from the curse
Of Turandot's fell ire; my fate's far worse.

KAL.

Princess, believe me; more your lot I mourn
Than e'en my own. So fair, so nobly born,
So gracious to th' unhappy;—I can ne'er
Forget your kindness to myself. If e'er
In need of faithful service you may stand,

Which I may render in return, command
Me as your slave. My gratitude's eternal.

ADEL.

From Turandot I'd save you. Her infernal
Devices throw a glamour o'er your senses:
But did you know her shallow, false pretences,
Of her great excellence you'd scorn the notion,
Nor waste on her your noble heart's devotion.
For all she sets up as a learned Sphinx,
She's nothing but a sly, conceited minx.

KAL.

Nay, blame not her, but adverse destiny,
Your brother willed his death; the choice was free.
Your father fell in battle—'twas ill-fate
Awarded death, not she. Oh, do not hate
Your mistress; surely she your worth esteems
And treats you as your gentle birth beseems.
To-morrow, if I'm victor as before
I'll freedom give you, and your throne restore.

ADEL.

Can nothing your credulity convince?
Oh, fly this wicked woman, dearest Prince.
Escape with me! Come haste! Our time is short;
I've bribed your guards. We'll sail from the next port
To Keicobad—there all will hail me Queen.

KAL.

Farewell, Princess; magnanimous you've been.
Escape alone. To die I am content,
You cannot turn me from my firm intent.

ADEL.

Ungrateful man! Then learn the horrid truth.
The heart of Turandot can feel no ruth.
You've foiled her cunning. Fear her tiger-spring.
To-morrow as you pass to join the King
In high divan,—her slaves, with stealthy blow,
Will pierce your heart;—your life will be laid low.

KAL.

Oh, hapless Kalaf! must thy life thus end?
In exile perish—far from ev'ry friend!
O Timur, dearest father, couldst thou see
Thine only son in such deep misery,
All Tartary thou'dst gladly give to save
Its royal heir from such untimely grave.

(Covers his face in despair.)

ADEL. *(aside)*

Kalaf, future Khan of Tartarland!
(Most luckily the last-told lie I planned.)
He's in my power. If he escape one net,
He'll fall into another, closer yet.

KAL. *(to himself.)*

I've said "Or death or Turandot." Her will
Decrees my death—from her 'tis, welcome still.
Adieu, fond hopes. Delusive joys, farewell!

ADEL.

Once more let me implore you. Do not sell
Your life thus cheap. We still have time for flight.

KAL.

My honour bids me stay and brave the fight.

ADEL.

You're obstinate. Farewell, then, *unknown stranger*,
(*aside.*) My love despised! I burn with jealous anger.
Prince Kalaf, Timur's son! you're in my snare;
I can be fierce as Turandot. Beware! (*Exit.*)

KALAF.

I'm on the rack! when will this torture cease?

(*Enter BRIGHELLA.*)

BRIG.

'Tis time to join divan, Prince, if you please.

(*KALAF regards him suspiciously.*)

KAL.

Art thou her tool? Shall I by thy hand fall?
Stain not thy soul with guiltless blood. Take all
I have, if money be thy greed. But know
Without a struggle I'll not take thy blow.

(*Draws his-sword.*)

BRIG.

His brain is addled, sure as eggs is eggs!
Lor', how he stands, astraddling out his legs!

KAL. (*throws down his sword.*)

I'll not defend myself. Tell her who offered
Base gold for life, my breast I freely proffered
To meet th' assassin's knife. There lies my sword.
Fulfil her stern behest.

BRIG.

Upon my word
And honour, my strict orders are, to see
You safely to divan. His Majesty
Is all agog to see the fun.

KAL. (*to himself.*)

Alive

I ne'er shall reach divan. My death I'll strive
To calmly meet. Perchance my bleeding corse
Will melt her heart to pity and remorse.

(Exit, BRIGHELLA following him; guards receive him outside.
Music strikes up.)

SCENE.—*High Divan, as in Act II. ALTOUM discovered on his throne; PANT. and TART. beside it; the eight Doctors seated; Guard under arms. Behind a curtain, in the background, is an altar, with a Chinese idol: a Chinese priest on each side of it. KALAF enters, agitated, and looking suspiciously around him; bows to ALTOUM.*

KAL. (*aside.*)

Do I still live? Each step, I thought to feel
The thrust of an assassin's deadly steel.
Adelma's warning was some dream, or now I dream.

ALT.

My son, care sits upon thy brow.
Glad news I have in store for thee. Alone
Joys come not. Turandot shall be thine own.
Three times to-night she sent to me to pray
I would defer th' encounter of to-day.
'Tis evident her pride is sorely vext,
She'd hide her failure by some vain pretext.
Rejoice, all blessings for thy weal combine,
To-day full happiness on thee shall shine.

PANT. (*to KALAF, confidentially*)—

Believe me, if so please your Majesty—
(I mean your Majesty that is to be.)
Your future wife's ill-temper there's no bearing;
Her tantrums and hysterics are quite wearing.
A hundred times I was called up last night
To try and set this knotty question right.
I'd scarcely time my slippers to resume,
Much less to dress in proper court costume.
I just popped on my crimson satin breeches,—
I fear I caught a cold; (*sneezes*) must put on leeches,
A blister p'raps—take horrid water-gruel.

(*Blows, his nose portentously.*)

No breakfast yet I've swallowed 'Tis too cruel!
Who'd be Prime Minister? to starve and toil,
And fret and fume in an eternal coil.
But yet, I would not, for a hundred dollar
Have missed the sight of her rampagious cholera;
I was rejoiced my turn had come to grin,
Just as folks do at me when Harlequin
Before my nose runs off with Columbine,
In every stupid Christmas pantomime.

TART.

I-I was c-called up-p *inaspettatamente*,
S-she b-begged m-my a-ai-aid qu-quite *disperatamente*.

ALT.

Prepare the altar.

(*A curtain is raised, disclosing an altar with a Chinese deity.
Two priests attending.*)

Hither call our daughter;
Obedience to the law shall now be taught her.
Set open all the doors! Lo, where she comes.

(A slow march is heard. TRUFFALDIN and slaves enter, in mourning garments, with weepers of crape attached to their pigtails. Female slaves in black veils: then TURANDOT, ADELMA, and SKIRINA, all demonstrating extreme dejection. TURANDOT ascends her throne with the same ceremonies as in Act II.)

PANT.

Is this a wedding march, with muffled drums?
It sounds more like a dead march, dull and dreary—
The one in "Saul," or Verdi's *Miserere*.
Her sulky Highness looks as black as thunder
At having thus in public to knock under.

TUR. (*to KALAF*).

This sad procession, Prince *Incognito*
Profound humiliation is to show.
Your arrogance upon my shame will gloat,—
Your eyes on your defeated slave will doat.
I see the altar—Fo-hi's grand official
Prepared to bind the victim sacrificial.
My glory's dead—disgraced is Turandot!
Condemned to wear the chain of Hymen's knot.

KAL.

Oh, couldst thou know how deeply I revere
Thy maiden dignity, not thus severe
Thoud'st show thyself, nor my fond love resent.
As slave to thee my whole life shall be spent;
But deign one gracious sign to give, that thou
In time, responsive tenderness mayst know.

ALT.

Prince, condescend no more. Commence the rite!

TUR.

One moment more. (*Sarcastically*.) I am not ready, quite.

(Rises and addresses KALAF)—

I raised your hopes, that they might deeper fall.
Prince Kalaf, Son of Timur, quit this hall
And China's realm. Go, seek another bride.
In vain my penetration you defied;
No secret's hidden from the Chinese Sphinx.

SKIR. (*aside*).

She never naps—not e'en for forty winks!

KAL.

Ah, woe is me!

ALT.

Dear me, what is the matter?
I cannot hear thro' all this general chatter.

PANT, (*aside*).

I shan't attempt just now to make him hear;
I'm dazed myself, and his head's *never* clear.

TART.

W-what a c-ca-cat-as-ass-astrophe! *Corpo di Bacco!*
H-he m-must r-re-return—*colle pive nel sacco*.

KAL.

My overloving heart has caused my woe,
I gave up all, to please my lovely foe.
If yesterday I purposely had failed
To win the day, or from the contest quailed,
My soul had now found rest. Ah, why
Altoum, wert thou too merciful? To die
To-day, if conquered, should have been my meed—
Great Emperor, thus shouldst thou have decreed.

ALT.

Poor Kalaf! tears mine aged eyes bedew.

(*wipes hit eyes.*)

TUR. (*aside to SKIRINA*)—

His grief affects me deeply; strangely new
Emotions swell my bosom.

SKIR.

Put an end
To trifling. Far as Jericho I'd send
All shilly-shally. Do, for goodness' sake
Speak out and say, "As husband I thee take."
I've married twice, and know how shy one feels—

Plunge in at once, right over head and heels.
A royal Crown Prince, too; my stars and garters!
Crème de la crème—the cream of Crimean Tartars!

ADELMA.

My soul by doubt and hate is torn;
She loves him, though she shows such bitter scorn.
I'm stung to anguish, yet I'll not repine,
My rival's torture is as sharp as mine.

(*KALAF has stood bowed down by grief; he starts suddenly and approaches TURANDOT's throne*)—

KALAF.

Thy cruel will shall find no more resistance;
Why need the headsman end my sad existence?
This dagger shall release....

(*Unsheathes a dagger. ADELMA makes a movement of horror. TURANDOT precipitates herself from the throne, and stays his hand.*)

TUR.

Stay, Kalaf, stay!
Or strike thy heart through mine.

(Throws herself across his breast.)

ALT.

What does she say?

(TURANDOT and KALAF gaze at each other in silence, for some time.)

KAL.

Wouldst doom me to a life, of love bereft?
My hopes and joys all faded—nothing left.
Such mercy seeks more cruelly to kill;
But my despair is stronger than thy will.

(Attempts to stab himself.)

Tur.

For my sake, live; nor ever quit my side;
Prince, take me as your loving, happy bride.

ADELMA *(aside)*.

'Tis agony; I cannot bear this sight. *(Retires.)*

ALT.

What do they say? *(to PANT., who endeavours to explain)*.
Don't speak. I see all's right.

SKIR.

Fo-hi be praised! Now, this is what I call
A great success. My pig has done it all.

(Fetches BARAK from behind the crowd)—

Come, dearest husband; much too long you've trembled.

TUR.

Let it be known to all those here assembled—
I may not justly claim the victor's crown,
Adelma's shrewdness served me; not my own.
Prince Kalaf vanquished me, and may command
As prize of his achievement, my poor hand.
(To KALAF.) But not in deference to lawful right
I gave myself to thee, but through love's might.
My heart was thine, when first I did behold thee.

KALAF.

Excess of bliss, thus to my heart to fold thee!

ALT.

What do they say? You all make such a noise,
I can't hear anything—not my own voice.
No doubt it's quite correct, nay, sentimental;

So take my blessing and consent parental.

TART.

F-f-friend F-pa-pantaloan, what j-j-joy! *Che dolci affetti!*
P-prep-p-pare the b-ba-ban-qu-quet. *Mangerem confetti!*

ALTOUM *joins the lover's hands, and places his hands on their heads. The eight Doctors join hands and dance in a circle, nodding their chins.* PANT. *and TART. dance together.* BARAK *and SKIRINA ditto.* TRUFFALDIN *twirls round ADELMA, who snubs him.* BRIGHELLA *and guards gravely jump up and down. Tableau.*

END OF ACT IV.

FINIS.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TURANDOT: THE CHINESE SPHINX ***

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