

A TALE OF MYSTERY

A Mélo-Drame In Two Acts

by

THOMAS HOLCROFT

First performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, November 13, 1802.

Cast of Characters

BONAMO	PIERO
ROMALDI	EXEMPT
FRANCISCO	SERLINA
STEPHANO	FIAMETTA
MONTANO	GARDENERS, PEASANTS, MUSICIANS,
MICHELLI	DANCERS, ARCHERS
MALVOGLIO	

ACT I.

A hall in the house of Bonamo, with two side doors, and folding doors in the back scene: a table, pen, ink, and paper, chairs, etc. Music to express discontent and alarm.

Enter Selina and Fiametta.

Sel. You seem hurried, Fiametta.

Fiam. Hurried, truly! Yes, yes, and you'll be hurried too.

Sel. I?

Fiam. Fine news!

Sel. Of what kind?

Fiam. A very bad kind. The Count Romaldi—

Sel. (Alarmed) What of him?

Fiam. Is coming.

Sel. When?

Fiam. This evening.

Sel. Heavens! What can he want?

Fiam. Want? He wants mischief. We all know he wants you to marry his son, because you're a rich heiress.

Sel. Surely, my uncle will never consent?

Fiam. Your uncle and all Savoy fear him.

Bona. (Calling without) Fiametta!

Fiam. I am here, sir.

Bona. But I want you here.

Fiam. Lord, sir, I am busy.

Sel. Go, run to my uncle.

Fiam. It's a shame that he should not think of marrying you to his own son, when he knows how dearly you love each other.

Sel. It is the excellence of my dear uncle's heart, that disdains the appearance of self-interest.

Fiam. So, rather than he blamed himself, he'll make you and I and everybody miserable! But I'll talk to him.

Bona. (Without) Fiametta, I say!

Fiam. Coming! (Going) He shall hear of it. I'm in the proper cue. He knows I'm right, and I'll not spare him. *Exit, talking.*

Hunting music. Enter Stephano, with his fowling-piece, net, and game.

Sel. Why are you so late, Stephano? I had a thousand alarms.

Steph. Forgive me, dear Selina. The pursuit of game led me too far among the mountains.

Sel. Do you know — ?

Steph. What?

Sel. I almost dread to tell you. Count Romaldi is coming.

Steph. Romaldil!

Sel. I shudder, when I recollect the selfishness of his views, and the violence of his character.

Steph. Add, the wickedness of his heart.

Music, to express chattering contention.

Enter Bonamo and Fiametta.

Fiam. I tell you again, sir, it is uncharitable, it is cruel, it is hard-hearted in you to give any such orders.

Bona. And I tell you they shall be obeyed. Have not I a right to do as I please in my own house?

Fiam. No, sir, you have no right to do wrong anywhere.

Steph. What is the dispute, sir?

Fiam. He has ordered me to turn the poor Francisco out of doors, because, forsooth, the house is not large enough to hold this Count Romaldil.

Sel. Think, my dear uncle, how grateful and kind is his heart.

Steph. And that he is a man of misfortune.

Bona. Folly and misfortune are twins: nobody can tell one from the other. He has got footing here, and you seem all determined he shall keep it.

Sel. I own I am interested in his favor. His manners are so mild!

Steph. His eye so expressive!

Sel. His behaviour so proper!

Fiam. I'll be bound he is of genteel parentage!

Bona. Who told you so?

Fiam. Not he, himself, for certain, because, poor creature, he is dumb. But only observe his sorrowful looks. What it is I don't know, but there is something on his mind so —

Bona. You are a fool!

Fiam. Fool or not, I have served you faithfully these three-and-twenty years; so you may turn me out of doors at last, if you please.

Bona. I?

Fiam. Yes; for if you turn Francisco out, I'll never enter them again.

Bona. You certainly know more concerning this man?

Fiam. Since it must be told, I do.

Bona. Then speak.

Fiam. It is quite a tragedy!

Bona. Indeed! Let us hear.

Fiam. It is now seven or eight years ago, when, you having sent me to Chamberry, I was coming home. It was almost dark; everything was still; I was winding along the dale, and the rocks were all as it were turning

black. Of a sudden, I heard cries! A man was murdering! I shook from head to foot! Presently the cries died away; and I beheld two bloody men, with their daggers in their hands, stealing off under the crags at the foot of the mill. I stood like a stone, for I was frightened out of my wits! So I thought I heard groans; and, *afraid* as I was, I had the sense to think they must come from the poor murdered creature. So I listened, and followed my ears, and presently I saw this very man —

Sel. Francisco?

Fiam. Weltering in his blood! To be sure I screamed and called loud enough; for what could I do by myself? So presently my cries *was* heard; and honest Michelli, the miller, with his man, came running.

Bona. I now remember the tale. The poor man recovered, and everybody praised Michelli.

Fiam. So they ought; he is an honest good soul! What then, sir, can you suppose I thought, when about a week ago, I again saw Francisco's *apparition* standing before me, making signs that he was furnished with hunger and thirst? I knew him at once, and he soon bethought himself of me. If you had seen his clasped hands, and his thankful looks, and his dumb notes, and his signs of joy at having found me! — While I have a morsel, he shall never want. I'll hire him a cottage; I'll wait upon him; I'll work for him; so turn him out of doors, if you have the heart.

Steph. Fiametta, you wrong my father.

Bona. I'll hear his story from himself.

Fiam. He can't speak.

Bona. But he can write.

Fiam. I'll warrant him. I'm sure he's a gentleman.

Bona. Bring him here: if he prove himself an honest man, I am his friend.

Fiam. I know that, or you should be no master of mine. *Exit.*

Steph. His kind attentions to Selina are singular.

Sel. Every morning I find him waiting for me with fresh gathered flowers, which he offers with such modest yet affectionate looks!

Fiametta returns with Francisco, the latter poor in appearance, but clean, with a reserved, placid, and dignified air.

Bona. Come near, friend. You understand his gestures, Fiametta; so stay where you are.

Fiam. I intend it.

Bona. (*To himself*) He has a manly form! a

benevolent eye! *(Aloud)* Sit down, sir. Leave us, my children. *(Francisco suddenly rises, as Stephano and Selina offer to go, brings them back, and intreats they may remain)* Since he desires it, stay. — There is pen, ink, and paper: when you cannot give answer by signs, write, but be strict to the truth. *(Francisco, with dignity, points to heaven and his heart)* Who are you? *(Francisco writes; and Stephano, standing behind him, takes up the paper and reads the answers)*

Fran. "A noble Roman!"

Bona. Your family? —

Fran. *(Gives a sudden sign of forbear! and writes)* "Must not be known."

Bona. Why?

Fran. "It is disgraced."

Bona. By you? *(Francisco gesticulates)*

Fiam. *(Interpreting)* No, no, no!

Bona. Who made you dumb?

Fran. "The Algerines."

Bona. How came you in their power?

Fran. "By treachery."

Bona. Do you know the traitors? *(Francisco gesticulates)*

Fiam. *(Eagerly)* He does! he does!

Bona. Who are they?

Fran. "The same who stabbed me among the rocks." *(A general expression of horror)*

Bona. Name them.

Fran. *(Gesticulates violently, denoting painful recollection; then writes)* "Never!"

Bona. Are they known by me?

Fiam. *(Interpreting)* They are! They are!

Bona. Are they rich?

Fran. "Rich and powerful."

Bona. Astonishing! Your refusal to name them gives strange suspicions. I must know more; tell me all, or quit my house.

Music to express pain and disorder. Enter Piero.

Pier. Count Romaldi, sir. *(Francisco starts up, struck with alarm)*

Steph. So soon!

Bona. Show him up.

Pier. He's here.

Similar music. Romaldi suddenly enters, as Francisco is attempting to pass the door: they start back at the sight of each other. Romaldi recovers himself; and Francisco, in an agony of mind, leaves the room.

Bona. What is all this! — Where is he gone? — Call him back, Fiametta.

Exeunt Fiametta and Stephano, both regarding Romaldi with dislike.

Rom. *(Wish forced ease)* At length, my good friend, I am here. I have long promised myself the pleasure of seeing you. Your hand.

How hearty you look! And your lovely niece! Her father's picture!

Bona. Rather her mother's.

Rom. My son will adore her. In two days I expect him here. I have serious business to communicate.

Sel. *(To her uncle)* Permit me to retire, sir.

Bona. *(Tenderly)* Go, my child; go.

Sel. *(Aside)* Grant, oh merciful Heaven, I may not fall a sacrifice to avarice. *Exit.*

Bona. And now your pleasure, Count?

Rom. Nay, I imagine, you can guess my errand. You know my friendship for my son, who, let me tell you, is your great admirer. The care you have bestowed upon your niece, her education, mind and manners, and the faithful guardian you have been, both of her wealth and person, well deserve praise.

Bona. If I have done my duty, I am greatly fortunate.

Rom. She is a lovely young lady, and you are not ignorant of my son's passion; to which your duty towards your niece must make you a friend. I therefore come, with open frankness, to propose their union.

Bona. And I, with equal candor, must tell you, I can give no answer.

Rom. *(Haughtily affecting surprise)* No answer?

Bona. Your rank and wealth make the proposal flattering; but there is a question still more serious.

Rom. *(In the same tone)* What can that be?

Bona. One which my niece only can resolve.

Rom. Inexperience like hers should have no opinion.

Bona. How, my lord? Drag the bride, by force, to that solemn altar, where, in the face of Heaven, she is to declare her choice is free?

Rom. Mere ceremonies!

Bona. Ceremonies! Beshink yourself; lest marriage become a farce, libertinism a thing to laugh at, and adultery itself a snable offence!

Rom. Ay, ay; you are a moralist, a conscientious man. Your son is reported to have designs on Selina.

Bona. My lord!

Rom. No anger; I speak as a friend. Her fortune is tempting; but you disdain to be influenced. The wealth and rank of our family —

Bona. Surpass mine. True; still my niece, I say, must be consulted.

Rom. Indeed! *(Sternly)* Then my alliance, it seems, is refused?

Bona. By no means: I have neither the right to refuse nor to accept. If Selina —

Re-enter Selina with a letter.

Sel. (Presenting it to Bonamo) From the unfortunate Francisco.

Rom. What, that strange fellow I met as I came in?

Sel. (Aside) He knows his name!

Rom. I forgot to ask you how he got admittance here?

Sel. (With marked displeasure) I should hope, my lord, there would always be some charitable door open to the unfortunate!

Rom. (With courteous resentment) I address your uncle, lovely lady.

Bona. When you came in, he was relating his adventures, which have been strange.

Rom. (Retaining himself) And are you, my friend, simple enough to believe such tales?

Sel. What tales, my lord?

Bona. The proofs are convincing! The mutilations he has suffered; the wounds he received, not a league from hence; the —

Rom. (Alarmed) Did he name — ?

Bona. Who? The monsters that gave them? — No; but they are not unknown to him.

Rom. That — that is fortunate.

Bona. I was amazed to learn —

Sel. That they are rich and powerful. But I forget: the story can have no interest for you.

Roni. (Eagerly) You mistake: I — (Recollecting himself) my feelings are as keen as yours.

Bona. But what has he written? (Offers to open the letter)

Rom. If you will take my advice, you will not read. Doubtless he has more complaints, more tales, more favors to request. Be kind and hospitable; but do not be a dupe.

Bona. Of which, I own, there is danger.

Rom. (Seizing the letter, which Bonamo carelessly holds) Then let me guard you against it.

Sel. (After continually watching and suspecting Romaldi, snatches the letter back; while he, remarking her suspicions, is confused) This letter, my lord, was given in charge to me; I promised to bring an answer, and I respectfully intreat my uncle will read it.

Bona. Well, well. (Reads) "Friend of humanity, should I remain, the peace of your family might be disturbed. I therefore go; but earnestly intreat you will neither think me capable of falsehood nor ingratitude. — Wherever I am, my wishes and my heart will be here. — Farewell." He shall not go.

Rom. Why not? He owns the peace of your family may be disturbed.

Bona. Fly, Selina; tell him I require, I request, him to sleep here to-night, that I may speak with him to-morrow.

Rom. (Aside) That must not be.

Sel. Thanks, my dear uncle! you have made me happy. *Exit in haste.*

Confused music. Enter Piero.

Bona. What now, Piero?

Pier. Signor Montano is below.

Rom. (Alarmed and aside) Montano!

Bona. I'm very glad of it, for I wanted his advice. (To Romaldi) The best of men!

Pier. Please to come up, sir.

Rom. With your permission, I will retire.

Enter Montano. Music plays alarmingly, but piano when he enters and while he stays.

Mon. I beg pardon, good sir, but —

Music loud and discordant at the moment the eye of Montano catches the figure of Romaldi; at which Montano starts with terror and indignation. He then assumes the eye and attitude of menace, which Romaldi returns. The music ceases.

Can it be possible!

Rom. (Returning his threatening looks) Sir!

Mon. You here!

Rom. Not having the honor of your acquaintance, I know not why my presence should please or displease you.

Mon. (After a look of stern contempt at Romaldi, and addressing Bonamo) Good night, my friend; I will see you to-morrow.

Exit suddenly. Hurrying music, but half piano.

Bona. (Calling) Nay, but signor! Signor Montano! Are the people all mad? Fiametta!

Fiam. (Without) Sir!

Bona. Run, overtake him; and say I must speak with him. (Music ceases) Excuse me for going. (To Romaldi)

Rom. Why in such haste? I have heard of this Montano: a credulous person, a relator of strange stories.

Bona. Signor Montano credulous! There is not in all Savoy a man of sounder understanding. Good night, my lord; I will send your servant: that door leads to your bedroom. Call for whatever you want; the house is at your command.

Exit with looks of suspicion. Music of doubt and terror.

Rom. What am I to think? How act? — The arm of Providence seems raised to strike! — Am I become a coward? Shall I

betray, rather than defend myself? I am not yet an idiot.

Threatening music. Enter the Count's servant, Malvoglio, who observes his master. Music ceases.

Mal. Your lordship seems disturbed.

Rom. Francisco is here.

Mal. I saw him.

Rom. And did not your blood freeze?

Mal. I was sorry.

Rom. For what?

Mal. That my dagger had missed its aim.

Rom. We are in his power.

Mal. He is in ours.

Rom. What are your thoughts?

Mal. What are yours, my lord?

Rom. Guess them.

Mal. Executioners!

Rom. Infamy!

Mal. Racks!

Rom. Maledictions!

Mal. From all which a blow may yet deliver us.

Selina, entering and hiding behind the door, opposite to the chamber of Romaldi, overhears them.

Rom. 'Tis a damning crime!

Mal. Were it the first.

Rom. Where is he to sleep?

Mal. There! *(Pointing to the chamber opposite to Romaldi's)*

Sel. *(Behind the door)* They mean Francisco!

Rom. Obstinate fool! Since he will stay —

Mal. He must die.

Sel. The monsters!

Rom. I heard a noise.

Mal. *(Looking towards the folding doors)* He's coming.

Rom. Let us retire and concert —

Mal. Then, at midnight—

Rom. When he sleeps —

Mal. He'll wake no more!

Exeunt to the chamber of the Count.

The stage dark: soft music, but expressing first pain and alarm, then the successive feelings of the scene. Fiametta enters, with Francisco and a lamp, which she places on the table. She regards him with compassion, points to his bedroom, then curtsies with kindness and respect, and retires; he returning her kindness. He seats himself as if to write, rises, takes the lamp, looks round with apprehension, goes to the chamber-door of Romaldi, starts away with horror, recovers himself, again places the lamp on the table, and sits down to write. The door of Romaldi opens; Malvoglio half appears, watching Francisco; but, as he turns, again retires.

Enter Selina, who gently pulls the sleeve of Francisco: he starts, but seeing her, his countenance expands with pleasure. Music pauses on a half close.

Sel. *(In a low voice)* Dare not to sleep! I will be on the watch! Your life is in danger!
Exit. Music continues tremendous.

Francisco, greatly agitated, draws a pair of pistols, lays them on the table, and seats himself to consider if he should write more. Romaldi and Malvoglio appear. Music suddenly stops.

Rom. *(To Malvoglio)* Watch that entrance.
(To Francisco) Wretched fool! Why are you here?

Music: terror, confusion, menace, command. Francisco starts up, seizes his pistols, points them towards Romaldi and Malvoglio, and commands the former, by signs, to read the paper that lies on the table. Music ceases.

Rom. *(Reads)* "Repent; leave the house. Oblige me not to betray you. Force me not on self-defence." Fool! Do you pretend to command? *(Throws him a purse)* We are two. Take that, and fly. *(Music. Francisco, after a look of compassionate appeal, spurns it from him, and commands them to go. After which, sudden pause of music. — Aside to Malvoglio)* I know him; he will not fire.

Music. They draw their daggers; he at first avoids them; at length they each seize him by the arm, and are in the attitude of threatening to strike, when the shrieks of Selina, joining the music, which likewise shrieks, suddenly brings Bonamo, Stephano, and Servants, through the folding doors.

Sel. Uncle! Stephano! Murder!

Romaldi and Malvoglio, at hearing the noise behind, quit Francisco, and feign to be standing on self-defence. — Music ceases.

Bona. What mean these cries? What strange proceedings are here?

Sel. They are horrible.

Bona. Why, my lord, are these daggers drawn against a man under my protection?

Rom. Self-defence is a duty. Is not his pistol levelled at my breast?

Bona. *(To Francisco)* Can it be? *(Francisco inclines his head)* Do you thus repay hospitality?

Sel. Sir, you are deceived: his life was threatened.

Rom. *(Sternly)* Madam —

Sel. I fear you not! I watched, I overheard you!

Bona. Is this true?

Rom. No.

Sel. By the purity of heaven, yes! Behind that door, I heard the whole; Francisco must quit the house, or be murdered.

Rom. (To *Bonamo* sternly) I expect, sir, my word will not be doubted.

Bona. My lord, there is one thing of which I cannot doubt: the moment you appeared, terror was spread through my house. Men's minds are troubled at the sight of you: they seem all to avoid you. Good seldom accompanies mystery; I therefore now decidedly reply to your proposal, that my niece cannot be the wife of your son; and must further add, you oblige me to decline the honor of your present visit.

Rom. (With threatening haughtiness) Speak the truth, old man, and own you are glad to find a pretext to colour refusal, and gratify ambition. Selina and Stephano; you want her wealth, and mean in that way to make it secure. But beware! Dare to pursue your project, and tremble at the consequences! To-morrow, before ten o'clock, send your written consent; or dread what shall be done.

Exeunt Romaldi and Malvoglio:
appropriate music.

Bona. Dangerous and haughty man! But his threats are vain; my doubts are removed; Selina shall not be the victim of mean precaution, and cowardly fears. I know your wishes, children. Let us retire. (To his Servants) Make preparations for rejoicing: early to-morrow, Stephano and Selina shall be affianced. (Music of sudden joy, while they kneel)

Steph. My kind father!

Sel. Dearest, best of guardians! (Music pauses)

Bona. Francisco shall partake the common happiness.

Fiam. (As they are all retiring) Dear, dear! I shan't sleep to-night.

Exeunt: Bonamo expressing friendship to all, which all return, Francisco with joy equal to that of the lovers. Sweet and cheerful music, gradually dying away.

End of the First Act.

ACT II.

Scene I.

A beautiful garden and pleasure grounds, with garlands, festoons, love devices and every

preparation for a marriage festival. Joyful music. First and Second Gardeners, Piero and his Companions, all busy.

Pier. Come, come; bestir yourselves! The company will soon be here.

First Gard. Well; let them come: all is ready.

Pier. It has a nice look, by my sackins!

First Gard. I believe it has! thanks to me.

Pier. Thanks to you?

Second Gard. And me.

Pier. And you? Here's impudence! I say it is thanks to me.

First and Second Gard. You, indeed!

Pier. Why, surely, you'll not have the face to pretend to deny my incapacity?

First Gard. Yours?

Second Gard. Yours?

Pier. Mine! mine!

Enter Stephano.

Steph. What is the matter, my honest friends?

First Gard. Why, here's Mr. Piero pretends to dispute his claim to all that has been done.

Second Gard. Yes; and says everything is owing to his incapacity.

First Gard. Now I maintain the incapacity was all my own. (To Stephano) Saving and excepting yours, sir.

Second Gard. And mine.

First Gard. Seeing you gave the first orders.

Pier. But wasn't they given to me, sir? Didn't you say to me, Piero, says you —

Steph. (Interrupting) Ay, ay; each man has done his part: all is excellent, and I thank you kindly. Are the villagers invited?

Pier. Invited! They no sooner heard of the wedding than they were half out of their wits! There will be such dancing and sporting! Then the music! Little Nanine, with her hurdy-gurdy; her brother, with the tabor and pipe; the blind fiddler, the lame piper, I and my jew's harp! such a band!

Steph. Bravo! Order everything for the best.

Pier. But who is to order? Please to tell me that, sir?

Steph. Why, you.

Pier. There! (To his companions) Mind! I am to order! Mark that!

Steph. You shall be major-domo for the day.

Pier. You hear. I am to be — do — drum-major for the day!

Steph. Selina is coming. To your posts.

Music. They hurry each to his garland, and conceal themselves by the trees and bushes.