THE RAKE'S VISIT

A One-Act Capriccio on a Theme from *Don Giovanni*

by Wim Coleman

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The Rake's Visit

synopsis

Prague, 1787: It is the night before the scheduled world premiere of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni.* The aging roué Giacomo Casanova has read the libretto—and he hates it. When he goes to Mozart's lodgings hoping to rewrite it, Mozart won't even see him. But Mozart's wife, Constanze, is intrigued by the legendary rake, and the two of them pass the night in the "alchemical brandy" of storytelling.

Wim Coleman
biography

Wim Coleman (he/him) is a playwright, poet, novelist, and nonfiction writer. His play *The Harrowing* was performed as a reading in New York in 2023 at the Theater for the New City as part of its New City, New Blood Readings Series. His play *The Mad Scene* was awarded First Place in the Script category of the 91st Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition. His play *Shackles of Liberty* was the winner of the 2016 Southern Playwrights Competition. Two collections of his one-act plays, *Nine Muses* and *Stages of History,* are currently in print, and his plays have appeared in anthologies along with works by authors ranging from Molière to David Mamet. His book of poetry, *I.O.U.,* was published in 2020, and his "love ballad" *The King and the Beggar Lady* was published in 2022. Novels that he has co-authored with his wife, Pat Perrin, include *Anna's World*, the Silver Medalist in the 2008 Moonbeam Awards, and *The Jamais Vu Papers*, a 2011 finalist for the Eric Hoffer/Montaigne Medal. Wim is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America and PEN International, San Miguel Center.

SETTING:
Prague, October 28, 1787.

CHARACTERS:
Giacomo Girolamo Casanova, age 62
Constanze Mozart, age 25

*

Mi tradì quell'alma ingrata,
infelice, o Dio, mi fa.
Ma tradita e abbandonata,
provo ancor per lui pietà.

The professional seducer … is an abominable man, essentially the enemy of the person on whom he has designs. He is a true criminal who, if he has the qualities required to seduce, makes himself unworthy of them by abusing them to make a woman unhappy.

—Giacomo Girolamo Casanova

People whose desire is solely for self-realization never know where they are going. They can't know.

—Oscar Wilde

The Rake's Visit

(Night; a room in Bertramka, a villa in Prague owned by František and Josepha Dušek, October 28, 1787. A knock is heard. CONSTANZE MOZART *opens the door to reveal a frail and aging* GIACOMO CASANOVA*, who carries a manuscript under his arm.)*

GIOCAMO.
Pardon my intrusion at such an hour, but …
do I have the pleasure
of addressing Frau Mozart?

CONSTANZE.
I am she.

GIOCAMO.
(with a bow)
Allow me to introduce myself.
I am the Chevalier de Seingalt,
and I am at your service.
I wish to speak with Herr Mozart.
Would you kindly—?

CONSTANZE.
(escorting him inside and seating him)
Oh, a chevalier!
Imagine, a true chevalier, come to visit us!
Oh, no, good sir,
it is *I* who am at *your* service, very much so!
Give me just a moment,
Wolferl will be thrilled to see you,
the excellent Chevalier de—
what was that name again?

GIOCAMO.
De Seingalt.

CONSTANZE.
The Chevalier de Seingalt.
The illustrious Chevalier de Seingalt.
Yes, he will be thrilled,
I'll bring him right to you.

*(*CONSTANZE *exits briefly, then returns.)*

CONSTANZE.
I'm so sorry, but it's just as I expected—
he wants nothing to do with you.
He says to go away and leave him alone and—
forgive me, sir, his words, not mine—
you can lick your own ass
and eat your own shit.
(helping him out of his chair and leading him toward the door)
Oh, please don't take it to heart.
It's just that he's a chevalier himself, as I suppose you know,
in the Papal Order of the Golden Spur,
so chevaliers don't impress him,
and frankly, they don't impress me either.

GIOCAMO.
But—a fellow Freemason?

CONSTANZE.
Oh, who isn't a Freemason these days?
Prague is crawling with them,
and so, for that matter, is the rest of Europe.
Wolferl and I find them wherever we go,
they're getting to be a nuisance.
No, Mr.—what was that name again?

GIOCAMO.
De Seingalt.

CONSTANZE.
You really must leave. He can't see anyone.
He's not permitted human company—
except mine, of course,
and not even mine for—how may I put it?—
conjugal matters, even so.
His friends have got him all locked up, you see.

GIOCAMO.
Yes, so I hear. To finish an opera
about that scoundrel of Spanish lore.
I'm told the premiere is tomorrow,
hence the urgency of my errand.
I have a copy of the libretto right here.
I'm a friend of the librettist.

CONSTANZE.
Renzo?

GIOCAMO.
Lorenzo Da Ponte. Yes.

CONSTANZE.
So he sent you?

GIOCAMO.
No, rather the opposite.
He'd be furious at my coming here.

CONSTANZE.
Well, that settles it.
If even Renzo doesn't want you to see him,
you really must go.

GIOCAMO.
This is a dreadful disappointment.

CONSTANZE.
Please don't let it get you down.
I'm sure life still holds a few pleasures,
a handful of simple joys to look forward to,
however dwindling they may be
for a man of your advanced years
and gouty disposition.

GIOCAMO.
Well, then. I will take my reluctant leave
of the charming and—if I may so—
rather enigmatic Frau Mozart.
Goodnight.

CONSTANZE.
But—just a moment.
The Chevalier de …
What was that name again?

GIOCAMO.
De Seingalt.

CONSTANZE.
I believe I have heard tell of you.

GIOCAMO.
Gossip, I'm sure,

and nothing to take seriously.
Goodnight.

CONSTANZE.
Wait. Let me see your hand.

*(*GIOCAMO *offers her his right hand.)*

CONSTANZE.
No, the other one.

*(*GIOCAMO *offers her his left hand.)*

CONSTANZE.
Where did you come by this wound?

GIOCAMO.
It's kind of you to be concerned,
but really, it happened many years ago,
and it's long since fully healed.
I've quite forgotten how I got it.

CONSTANZE.
Let me remind you.
You fought a duel in Warsaw
with a certain Polish colonel—
it was some twenty years ago, I believe—
a perfectly childish *affaire d'honneur*
over some twit of an Italian actress.
The colonel fired his pistol first,
and the ball went straight through this—this—
what do you call this webby flesh right here,
between your thumb and forefinger?
Well, never mind—
you fired right back, and the ball
entered your adversary's ribcage on his right,
ravaging his entrails on its way out the other side—
and yet somehow he did recover.

GIOCAMO.
What a fanciful spinner of tales you are, my dear.

CONSTANZE.
Don't "my dear" me. I'm not your "dear."
The Chevalier de Seignalt—I knew I'd heard that name,
but I didn't believe the rumors till just now.

You are none other than that infamous scoundrel
Giacomo Girolamo Casanova,
traveling incognito.
Yes, the notorious Casanova,
whose soul will roast forever in hell
if there's any justice in heaven.

GIOCAMO.
Curse this hand.
The doctors said at the time I ought to have it amputated.
I should have listened to them.

CONSTANZE.
Oh, yes,
that would have made you *much* harder to recognize.

GIOCAMO.
Since I am unwelcome, I will leave you.

CONSTANZE.
Oh, no, not till I give you a piece of my mind.
I've rehearsed it a thousand times
but never dreamed I'd get a chance to say it.
(pacing)
Men like you …
you, you rakes,
you roués,
you libertines,
you seducers,
you licentious snakes,
you, you,
you fornicators with your roving cocks
who fear neither burning hellfire
nor the burning pox …
(catching her breath)
I'm very angry.

GIACOMO.
I can tell. Do continue.

CONSTANZE.
You ruined my marriage—
well, no not my marriage,
or not *exactly* my marriage,
you ruined my husband,
or not my husband exactly,

what I mean is, you ruined Wolferl *as* a husband,
I mean, you ruin husbands left and right,
wherever you go,
whatever you do,
and … and …
(with a sigh)
Well, I actually really *did* rehearse it.

GIACOMO.
I'm sure you did.

CONSTANZE.
I've got it written down somewhere.

GIACOMO.
No need to go look for it.
You speak your piece eloquently.
Of course I've heard it all before verbatim
from wives who know me only now that I'm old
and only by reputation—
a blasted reputation with a life of its own,
quite apart from what I really am.
Legends are pernicious things, aren't they?
Especially when they inspire men to do …
well, things they oughtn't to do, but …
My dear girl, are you saying your husband has been unfaithful?

CONSTANZE.
Has he—?
Am I saying—?
(collapsing into a chair and breaking down in tears)
Oh, just please go away.

GIACOMO.
(offering her a handkerchief)
If he so much as looks at other women, he is an unforgivable cad.

CONSTANZE.
No, not other women,
women aren't the problem,
it's … it's … *sopranos.*

GIACOMO.
Ah, I see.

CONSTANZE.
Of course, I'm a soprano myself,
and quite a good one,
but neither my range nor my figure have been what they were
since I first gave birth
and shrieked and cursed at God and Wolferl,
and besides …

GIACOMO.
You wonder sometimes
whether he married *you* the woman
or *you* the soprano.

CONSTANCE.
I don't know.
Maybe.
Or maybe not exactly.
It's just that …

GIACOMO.
There have been other sopranos.

CONSTANZE.
(nodding)
He can sniff out a soprano
like some big old slobbering bloodhound.
He can tell just by looking at her throat
whether she's a coloratura or another type,
and whether she can hit a proper high C on stage,
or even a prolonged high F in bed
at certain climactic moments.

GIACOMO.
Yes, I too am not immune to the power
of a soprano's siren song.
A crystalline voice alone is enough to win my heart,
never mind even the person's sex.
I once made love to a castrato—
or so I thought, until said castrato gave me a son.

CONSTANZE.
Oh, yes, such a life you have led.
I must bore you silly.
Go, do not let me keep you.

GIACOMO.
No, with your permission, I …
I'd like to stay a little longer, if I may.
I don't wish to inconvenience you unduly,
but I think you might be just the one
to help me with my problem.
(thumbing through the manuscript)
Would you help me … to fix this dreadful libretto?
Or just a little bit of it, at least?
Maybe just an aria or two?
If you don't mind very much?
I'd hate to have squandered both my time and yours
with nothing to show for it.

CONSTANZE.
What's wrong with it?

GIOCAMO.
Well, obviously it's an abomination.
I knew it would be vile, but hadn't expected—*this,*
not even from Lorenzo,
who is shameless as only a priest may be
(and, oh, I can assure you,
he was even worse before he was defrocked).
What he has done here with the Don Juan legend …
well, he has cast to the winds
the abundant moral lessons of Tirso and Molière
out of sheer infatuation with this scoundrel.
Giovanni is the lying looking-glass
that shows Lorenzo as he loves to see himself—
a rake of irresistible allure;
his very villainy flatters men's dreams of debauchery,
of what they might do were their desires untethered
from decency or respect for womankind.
Oh, of course, in the end Giovanni does get swallowed up by hell and all—
the traditional perfunctory comeuppance
to lend an obligatory veneer of redeeming moral value.
But believe me, if you knew Lorenzo as I do—
well, he considers an eternity of hellfire
a reasonable price to pay for a lifetime of glutting his earthly appetites
and ruining the lives of myriad ladies.

CONSTANZE.
Aren't you a fine one to talk about ruining ladies' lives?

GIACOMO.
My dear Frau Mozart,
of the thousands of women
who have conquered my heart and eyes and loins,
I challenge you to find one—
even one—
whose life I have ruined,
or one still living
with whom I do not remain on the most cordial terms
even after many years.
I am not a deceiver,
nor have I ever been deceived;
I have never been unfaithful,
nor have I ever been betrayed;
I have lived a happy life,
and I have generously shared my happiness.
Friendship is my categorical imperative—
I treat every woman I meet as an end in herself
and *for* herself,
not as a means toward an end.
For you see, the pleasures of flesh upon flesh are brief
and all the sweeter for it,
while friendship—
ah, friendship!—
is eternal—
but only when it really lasts!
(thumbing through the libretto again)
You'll find no such friendship here.
It is bad enough that my depraved friend
has made a hero of a misogynist and a scoundrel;
he has also slandered an excellent lady.
I mean, of course, poor Donna Elvira,
whose portrait here I barely recognize
despite having known her for many years.

CONSTANZE.
Donna Elvira?

GIACOMO.
Yes.

CONSTANZE.
And you have known her for—?

GIACOMO.
Many, many years.

CONSTANZE.
But isn't Donna Elvira …?

GIACOMO.
Well?

CONSTANZE.
Isn't the whole opera …?

GIACOMO.
Go on and ask.

CONSTANZE.
… just a made-up story?

GIACOMO.
Of course, of course—
and so are we,
our lives and our selves,
mine and yours and everyone's,
and so is the world,
but slander is no less cruel on that account.
Consider the woeful case of Don Quixote—
even his author called him a madman;
he was anything but that.

CONSTANZE.
But—he really was—crazy.

GIACOMO.
Why so?

CONSTANZE.
He thought he was a knight errant.

GIACOMO.
No, he decided to *become* a knight errant,
a perfectly reasonable endeavor,
and he went about it as best he could—
would that all men were as sane as he.
I have devoted my own life to following his example.
(with a yawn and a sigh)
But perhaps I have overtaxed myself.
I am no longer young, as you are well aware,

and it's way past my bedtime.
I should take my leave before I—

CONSTANZE.
Oh, but you mustn't go, not yet!
Not when you've only started getting interesting!
(turning to go)
I've got to fetch Wolferl!
He's missing all the fun!

GIACOMO.
Wolferl?

CONSTANZE.
My husband.

GIACOMO.
Oh, yes. Wolfgang Mozart. The composer.
Forgive me, I get a bit addled at my age.
I came here to see him, didn't I?
About this dreadful libretto.
Well, perhaps we shouldn't disturb him just yet.
The truth is, I'm quite enjoying our little *tête-a-tête.*
In my experience, husbands are a nuisance at such moments.

CONSTANZE.
(laughing)
Such a rake you are, keeping my husband away!
A true scoundrel after all!
Now that you've got me cornered and alone,
whatever shall I do?
How can I help becoming your newest conquest?

GIACOMO.
There's no such danger—I thought I made that clear.
In love, I am never the victor,
always the vanquished.
Right now, though, I'm simply tired.

CONSTANZE.
What can I do to rouse your spirits?

GIACOMO.
Well, there's nothing for old man's spirits—
quite like *spirits.*

CONSTANZE.
A glass of cognac, perhaps?

GIACOMO.
You are too kind.

*(*CONSTANZE *pours a glass for each of them.)*

CONSTANZE.
It's not really cognac, I admit—
but Wolferl and I like to pretend that's what it is,
and not some dreadful cheap brandy.

GIACOMO.
My dear, there's no such thing as dreadful brandy.
Even the humblest glass brims with history.
Did you know it was invented by Arab alchemists?
Not as a philosopher's stone
to transmute baser metals into gold,
but as an elixir for …
Oh, but I digress from the matter at hand,
which was …
which was …
Don Quixote, was it?

CONSTANZE.
Donna Elvira.

GIACOMO.
Oh, yes, Donna Elvira.
Sweet slandered Donna Elvira.
(leafing through the manuscript again)
The worst offense against her—
let me see—
it's in the second act somewhere.
(finding the page he is looking for)
Ah, here it is—this aria,
utterly unworthy of her character …
(reads from the page)
Mi tradì quell'alma ingrata,
infelice, o Dio, mi fa.

CONSTANZE.
(reciting from memory, with just a hint of melody)
"Cruel heart, thou hast betray'd me,
Grief unending upon me he cast.

Pity yet lingers, I'll not upbraid thee,
Ne'er can I forget the past, the happy past.
When my wrongs arise before me,
Thoughts of vengeance stir my bosom,
But the love that at first he bore me,
Binds my heart to him at last."

(with a sigh)

The story of my life.

GIACOMO.

(searching for another page)

I refuse to believe that of you, my dear,
and it is most untrue of Donna Elvira.
To waver and waffle between vengeance and pity
toward a man not worth the trouble of either,
weeping over his treachery one moment,
throwing herself back into his arms another,
scarcely showing a hint of strength or resolve,
and finally, when the scoundrel is properly damned
and dragged by demons down into hell—
well, after all that,
to renounce worldly life and pleasure …

Io men vado in un ritiro
a finir la vita mia!
"I will retreat from the world
for the rest of my days!"

No, that would never be her way.
Oh, I suppose she found his body handy during a dull patch in her life,
and she took what meager pleasure she could get from it
despite his manifest incompetence in voluptuary ways.
When it was over—
and it was over very quickly—
she was quite relieved to see him on his way.
I'm sure she has forgotten him
as she's forgotten so many men—
though I flatter myself she still thinks of me
from time to time.

CONSTANZE.

So you—really did know her?

GIACOMO.

She was, as I suppose you'd put it, my first.

CONSTANZE.

She took your virginity?

GIACOMO.
Oh, hardly that.
She took nothing from me at all, least of all that.
She *gave,* gifted me until I burst
with the bounty of her being.

CONSTANZE.
But—your virginity?

GIACOMO.
I still have it.
It is a treasure she taught me to hold most dear,
even while I let the world ravish and consume me,
even while I succumb ever and again
to the throbbing bliss of all that's corporeal in woman.
Only death can take my virginity away.
Aren't you a virgin yourself, my dear?

CONSTANZE.
You should ask my children.

GIACOMO.
You seem to have … misconstrued my question.
But you are too young to understand.
True chastity of spirit can only be learned
from years of carnal experience.

CONSTANZE.
(staring out the window into the night)
Chastity of spirit—
that must be sweet.

GIACOMO.
But to return to the matter at hand,
which if memory serves …
if memory serves …
That duel in Poland, was it?

CONSTANZE.
Donna Elvira.

GIACOMO.
Oh, yes, Donna Elvira.
The unforgettable Donna Elvira.

CONSTANZE.
Sweet slandered Donna Elvira.
I feel as if I know her too—
a woman like myself
who was never betrayed, not really—
no, nothing as interesting as that—
nor ever really deceived,
and certainly never a victim,
oh no,
but she was bored, bored, bored
even unto death
with acting day and night in a play concocted by men,
a play that offered her only the roles
of maiden or mother, wife or wanton,
and never simply a woman;
yes, bored with men like Giovanni,
dull-witted and egotistical,
no good as husbands
nor even as lovers
except as passing amusements—
and she grew tired of amusements,
of silly fleeting fun.

GIACOMO.
You are starting to understand.

CONSTANZE.
(pouring more brandy for each of them)
Yes, I believe I know her story
as well as you, or even better.

GIACOMO.
Then by all means tell me.

CONSTANZE.
She longed to live not for amusement but for pleasure—
pleasure that sweeps away all boredom and pain,
devout and—and earnest pleasure,
profound and prolonged, palpable and rich,
pleasure penetrating into the heart,
aching with the sweetness of honey to the tongue,
pleasure deep and resounding and free …

GIACOMO.
Pleasure longing to be shared.

CONSTANZE.
Yes, and growing larger and stronger with every sharing,
and setting everything right that's wrong,
and making sense at last
of her strange little riddle of a life …

GIACOMO.
… and yours.

CONSTANZE
Oh, yes, please, and mine, and mine.

GIACOMO.
Pleasure rising ever up among the clouds …

CONSTANZE.
… then falling like liquid tresses
in elegant cascading braids.

GIACOMO.
But where could she find such infinite pleasure?

CONSTANZE.
In a place …
… a special place …
Listen …
When she was done with Giovanni
and he was out of her life for good …
she did just what she said she would do:
Io men vado in un ritiro …

GIACOMO.
"I will retreat from the world …"

CONSTANZE.
… a finir la vita mia!

GIACOMO.
"… for the rest of my days!"

CONSTANZE.
And so she fled this badly-written play of ours
with its maidens and mothers, wives and wantons,
husbands and heroes, rakes and roués—
bores and blockheads, all of them,
incapable of joy and laughter.

GIACOMO.
She went away in quest of a story.

CONSTANZE.
A storied world of purest play.

GIACOMO.
And did she find it?

CONSTANZE.
Oh, don't you remember?
How could you not remember?
Well, never mind—
what you can't remember
you must imagine—
imagine as I do now!
She took refuge in a holy place
along the river Loire—
it's called the Abbey of Thélème …

GIACOMO.
Ah, I know it well—
a made-up place, and a real one.

CONSTANZE.
… and there she dedicated herself to holiness—
as you yourself did when you were young, remember?

GIACOMO.
Of course I remember—
with the ingenuity of fancy.

CONSTANCE.
No ordinary convent or monastery,
but a cloister contrary to all others,
where she retreated from the world,
but didn't shun the world,
nor shut herself away,
because, because …

GIACOMO.
… because the abbey is open to the world.

CONSTANZE
That's right, wide open—

there's not even a wall around it!

GIACOMO.
Pah! What is a wall
but a check on those unable to check themselves,
wherein murmur, envy, and conspiracy
fester and burgeon into vice?

CONSTANZE.
And no clocks either,
nor bells to sound the hours,
for what greater waste of hours can there be
than to count the hours away?

GIACOMO.
And the monks and nuns—
their vows?

CONSTANZE.
No vows at all—
or not the customary vows:
they take no vow of chastity,
but mingle and marry
and otherwise love freely;
no vow of poverty,
for they live amid riches
of the world and the spirit;
no vow of obedience either,
because the motto of the abbey is …

GIACOMO *and* CONSTANZE.
… Do What Thou Wilt! …

GIACOMO.
… and nothing is forbidden there,
for vice and sin are the poisonous fruits
of law and order and authority.
Where all things are permitted,
temptation does not exist,
nor does ill will toward others.
And the nuns,
well, the nuns are clothed …

CONSTANZE.
… not in sober, somber black and white,
their faces hobbled

in starched harnesses of wimple or cornette,
but in … in …

GIACOMO.
Rapturous color!

CONSTANZE.
Yes! In red satin gowns
braided and purled with gold and silver,
and scarlet crimson stockings
reaching just above the knee,
circled with embroidered garters;
and beads, rings, bracelets, and necklaces
of carbuncles, rubies, and sapphires,
of beryls, garnets, and emeralds.
And the monks …

GIACOMO.
Ah, yes, the monks—
no weighty woolen cowls and cassocks for them,
oh, no,
but velvet breeches,
and doublets of gold and silver lamé,
and black velvet caps
spangled with rubies and emeralds
and topped off by a glorious white plume!

CONSTANZE.
And the men and women there
share a common duty—
to always fascinate and delight one another
with brilliant conversation,
gathered from liberal reading
in a library brimming with books
in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew …

GIACOMO.
… and French, Italian, and Spanish.

CONSTANZE.
And you were a novitiate there.

GIACOMO.
Yes—so very long ago.

CONSTANZE.
And it was there that Donna Elvira …
… that Donna Elvira and you …
… that she initiated you into …
… well, the art of …

GIACOMO.
Our copulation was alchemical;
for in our throes of rapture,
we swapped through parted lips,
o'er darting tongues,
antique Arab spirits,
brandy distilled by alchemists of yore,
an elixir of love—
liquid love distilled into—
into—perfection—
no, something greater than perfection—
it was—it was—
transubstantiation of liquid into light,
an infinite all-embracing aureole of golden light,
and—and—
Oh, that I were poet or saint enough
to put it into words!
My very self vanished into hers,
and hers into mine,
and we tumbled amid an infinite diversity,
an infinite union,
swelled together until we were as one with …
… with …

CONSTANZE.
God?

GIACOMO.
Well, I suppose if there is a God,
it must be Woman,
but …
no …
it was a power much greater than God,
greater even than Woman,
greater than the infinite,
greater than eternity.
But then …

CONSTANZE.
Yes, then?

GIACOMO.
My callow body—
the *man* in me—
could not sustain such bliss.
And I feared.
I doubted.
I looked away.
I drew us both back.
And so she and I
stooped into time and space again,
our habitations of flesh and bone,
of separate hearts
and separate minds
and separate souls.
And … well, this is very odd,
but if I remember correctly—
I sang to her …

CONSTANZE.
A song?

GIACOMO.
More like a recitative.
I can't remember the tune, such as it was, but …

CONSTANZE.
The words?

GIACOMO.
"No, no, my sweet,
it wasn't real!
No, no, my sweet,
it could not be real!
For what transpired between us even now
was but illusion,
transient as the day,
devious as the night;
such purity of light,
such clarity of love,
can never be
except in fancy insubstantial;
you and I are beings bound to earth,
twin finite burdens
walled by flesh,
enchained to the mass thereof.

No, no, my sweet,
I have lived long enough to know
things are not what they seem—
never what they seem!"

CONSTANZE.
And in reply she …

GIACOMO.
… sang!

CONSTANZE.
Yes, sang an aria!
And I believe I know the words
if not the melody …

GIACOMO.
Remind me, please!

CONSTANZE.
"Oh, you are wrong, my friend so wrong;
    and in an inkling,
    the merest twinkling,
you have lived, lived much too long.
    In just a trice
    you have grown wise,
wise beyond your tender years,
too full of wisdom, full of fears!"

GIACOMO.
Yes, I remember.

CONSTANZE.
"You say things are not what they seem;
    Alas, you err,
    do greatly err!
Things are *always* what they seem—
    our senses never
    trick us ever …"

GIACOMO.
    (continuing)
"It is *belief* that cheats the eyes…"

CONSTANZE.
(continuing)
"It is *belief* that always lies."

GIACOMO.
And then she made me a promise …

CONSTANZE.
"Go forth, go forth, my earnest friend;
live out your life
of joy and strife.
Return when you grow young again.
Until you do
I'll wait for you …"

GIACOMO.
(continuing)
"… and then we'll heed no laws, no rules …"

CONSTANZE.
(concluding)
"… together we'll be perfect fools!"

GIACOMO.
Yes, her very words.

CONSTANZE.
(tearfully)
And I … remember!

GIACOMO.
(touching her cheek)
But you are crying.

CONSTANZE.
It's nothing.

GIACOMO.
Tell me.

CONSTANZE.
Am I dreaming—or am I dying?
It must be one or the other.
Here we are, the two of us together,
and I don't believe I've ever felt so lost—
or so lonely.

GIACOMO.
Have you never felt it before—
this loneliness that must be shared by two?
It is the bitterest loneliness of all—
and also the loveliest.

CONSTANZE.
It's sad—so sad.
Soon we'll forget—*all this* ever happened—
this—this warmth of the brandy in our throats,
this yeasty aroma of fresh-baked stories,
the taste and—and tempo of our words—
this *moment* will die.

GIACOMO.
As all moments must and shall.
That is what moments are for,
to abide and then to perish,
and thank God for it.
We breathe, and then surrender every breath.
We light a candle, and we snuff it with a pinch of dampened fingers.
So it is with our lives, yours and mine and everybody's.
A life without death would not be worth living.
Death is what gives life meaning, gives it …

CONSTANZE.
Shape?

GIACOMO.
The very thing.
Death is the boundary that holds us back
from formlessness and void.

CONSTANZE.
My husband makes things that live forever.

GIACOMO.
Then he must be a fool.
I myself am writing my own life story,
from beginning to end—
my joys and sorrows,
masterstrokes and blunders,
triumphs and debacles,
feats of magic, feats of fraud,
mortifications manifold and glories ever-fleeting,

and, oh yes, ladies, ladies, ladies—
in dozens of volumes, thousands of pages, millions of words—
and my greatest fear is that I'll die
before I get the chance to burn them all,
every last scrap of ink on paper,
unread by any living soul …

CONSTANZE.
(smiling)
But remember—you must live long enough
to tell all your stories to Donna Elvira.

GIACOMO.
(dreamily and sleepily)
Yes, I mustn't forget,
she is waiting even now—
waiting for me to shed my years,
my prudence and sagacity,
and give myself over to sacred folly.
And now …
and now …
I wonder—has the time come round at last?
I feel so …
… so light and young!
Should I go there,
to that abbey by the Loire
and take her in my arms forever?

CONSTANZE.
(holding his hand)
Maybe tomorrow. Not right now.

GIACOMO.
(trying to rise from his chair)
You are right;
it is way past my bedtime;
I must return to my lodging,
and it is a long walk from here.

CONSTANZE.
(seating him)
Why not stay right here,
just for tonight?
My husband will not mind.

GIACOMO.
You have a husband?

CONSTANZE.
Wolfgang Mozart.

GIACOMO.
Wolfgang … ?

CONSTANZE
The composer.

GIACOMO.
Oh, yes—
I came to see him
on some sort of business …

CONSTANZE.
Not now.

GIACOMO.
That damned libretto, wasn't it?

CONSTANZE.
It can wait.

GIACOMO.
(barely able to keep his eyes open)
I suppose so.
I'm very tired.
Will you stay here with me?
Hold my hand just a little longer?
Oh, I know you think me to be
a rake and a scoundrel,
and so I am.
But I am old and harmless.

CONSTANZE.
I am young and anything but harmless.

GIACOMO.
Then I must surrender myself …
… to your kind mercy …

*(*GIACOMO *falls fast asleep;* CONSTANZE *smiles and holds his hand.)*

END OF PLAY.