

(DANILLO)

MEN: Ladies' Choice! Dear Madame, I'll rejoice if you look my way, And choose to say That you will dance with me!

ANNA: Gentlemen! It's plain to see If I selected One of you to dance with me, The rest would be dejected! Since that's true without a doubt, Let me, please, sit this one out; There are other girls in plenty! Yes, but not with twenty millions! Please, Madam—

DANILLO: —that I can safely guarantee!

MEN: Take my arm—say you'll dance with me!

DANILLO: 'For my word, how they persist! Time I got them all dismissed! I'll work on the supposition: What Madame needs is competition! (Exit.)

CASCADA: The most irritating experience Is finding yourself at a Ball, When the only desirable lady Appears not to see you at all.

ST. B.: With speeches the creatures weary us, Demanding the Vote, like a man; What Right-To-The-Vote has a lady Who won't pick a man when she can?

CASCADA: The honour's mine, sir—

ST. B.: Oh, no, it's mine, sir!

BOTH: For I'm the better candidate by far!

CASCADA: Would you be disputing it? More than that—refuting it!

ST. B.: I can't believe how naive, sir, you are!

CASCADA and BASSES: I'm a better man for her—

ZETA: And no doubt you've had quite a number of affairs, eh?

DANILLO (shrugging): Well—yes. You know how it is . . .

ZETA: Of course I do. And I suppose they've left you broke?

DANILLO: Not exactly—but very nearly. It's incredible how much money goes into a woman's hand. Particularly if it's a very small one. Your Excellency wouldn't believe . . .

ZETA: Oh yes, I would. Now look here, Danilo, you seem to know women.

DANILLO: Just a little . . . perhaps . . .

ZETA: It'll do. You're just the man for a delicate mission.

DANILLO: Provided it entails no work.

ZETA: It'll be a pleasure.

DANILLO: In that case, you couldn't find anyone more talented—or willing.

ZETA (leaning close to him): You have to get married.

DANILLO (jumping up): Get married? Call that a pleasure?

ZETA: Yes—when the lady has twenty millions!

DANILLO: Twenty millions? (Realising.) Madame Glavari! Never! I'll make any other woman happy. But Madame Glavari—not for a million millions!

ZETA (astonished): Why ever not? She's a very pretty woman! And do you realise that if she marries a Frenchman, our beloved Fatherland will be bankrupt?

DANILLO: Ah . . . so that's it! . . .

ZETA: My boy, your country needs you.

DANILLO (thoughtfully): If it's only a question of making sure she doesn't marry a foreigner, I think I could manage that all right!

ZETA: How?

DANILLO: Simply by eliminating anyone she might take an interest in—except a Pontevédrian, of course.

ZETA: Which brings us back to you.

DANILLO: That is quite out of the question.

ZETA: Confound it—why?

(The music of No. 8—FINALE, ACT I—begins.)

DANILLO: Because—well—because I'm a man of principle! And my principles are: fall in love—frequently; become engaged—rarely; marry—never.

(Off-stage, voices are heard calling): "Ladies' Choice! Ladies' Choice!"

(Some of the GENTLEMEN enter, excitedly. ANNA enters, escorted by ST. BRIOCHE, CASCADA, and the rest of the GENTLEMEN. While this is going on, dialogue continues):

ZETA: Ah! . . . Now it's the ladies' turn to choose their partners. Who'll catch the eye of the Widow, I wonder? . . . A dangerous moment, this . . .

DANILLO: All right—I can take a hint. You want me to go to work—now?

ZETA: The Fatherland would be grateful.