

Njegus (*producing telegram from pocket*): Oh—I forgot . . . An express telegram for you, Excellency.

ZETA (*giving him one of his looks*): Njegus, how is it you always forget the "express" telegrams? I'd get 'em quicker by carrier-pigeon. (*Scanning the message*) "The damn things in code again. (*He turns round—vaguely in the direction of the various attaches*) Gentlemen! I must ask you to join me . . .

(KROMOV, BOGDANOVITSCH and FRITSCHE hasten forward.)

. . . in a special conference.

(*The MEN register disappointment. DANILLO, having managed to disentangle himself from the GRISSETTES, now joins the group downstage. The rest of the GUESTS gradually disperse during the following dialogue.*)

DANILLO: Conference? What—in the middle of a party like this?

ZETA: The matter is pressing—urgent—vital. It says so on the telegram. (*Holds out telegram towards Njegus.*) Decode it! (*As Njegus is about to take it, snatches it back.*) No—not you!—or we'll find ourselves saddled with an order for two dozen mangel-wurzels or something. (*Hands telegram to DANILLO.*) You read it.

DANILLO (*reading telegram*): "Loss of Glavari millions would mean State bankruptcy inevitable . . ."

(*ALL react.*)

ZETA (*purposefully*): There's only one way out. An appeal to Madame Glavari's patriotism.

ALL: Hear, hear!

ZETA: If she has any regard for the Fatherland at all, she *must* marry a Pontevedrian.

ALL: Hear, hear!

ZETA: Count Danilo—you must appeal to her—find out what her true feelings are—

DANILLO: Hear, hear! . . . ("Take.") What? Me?

ZETA: Explain to her that we must know her intentions immediately. The matter is pressing—urgent—erm—

DANILLO: Vital?

ZETA: Exactly.

DANILLO: Very well. I'll do my best. If the Widow marries de Rosillon, I shall join the Foreign Legion.

ZETA (*with feeling*): Bravo! I shall give you a personal recommendation! (*To the others.*) Come along, gentlemen!

(ZETA leads off the others, talking with them as he goes.)

No. 23A . . . MELOS: "YOU'LL FIND ME AT MAXIM'S"

(*The GRISSETTES re-enter and run to DANILLO, who greets them delightedly—singing the tune and dancing with them.*)

(*Enter ANNA, now wearing a glamorous evening gown. DANILLO sees her, and, embarrassed, stops dancing.*)

ANNA (*smiling*): Oh, please don't let me interrupt—this is exactly how I wanted the party to be!

DANILLO (*stiffly*): Indeed?

(*He motions to the GRISSETTES to leave him alone with ANNA, but they are unwilling to leave, and he has practically to shoo them off the stage.*)

ANNA: Charming girls, aren't they? I engaged them for the night to make you completely at home.

DANILLO (*touché*): Is that so? It seems to me that the entire Pontevedrian Colony is also completely at home—

ANNA: Nevertheless, all this is for your benefit. I wanted you to have a good time—in the kind of surroundings to which you are accustomed.

DANILLO: I see . . . I'm sure I'm very flattered that you should have taken so much trouble, Madame.

ANNA: Not at all—it was a pleasure.

DANILLO: I can well believe it . . . Madame Glavari, there is an urgent matter that I would like to discuss with you, if I may.

ANNA: Certainly. Won't you sit down?

DANILLO: Thank you.

(*He sits—and tries to compose himself. Suddenly realising that ANNA is still standing, he leaps up as if shot out of a gun.*) Oh! . . . I beg your pardon!

(*Very embarrassed again, he motions ANNA to a seat. When she has settled herself comfortably, he begins to speak without looking directly at her:*) Madame Glavari . . . To come straight to the point—

(*He breaks off, aware that she is trying to attract his attention. He looks at her, to find that she is motioning to him to sit beside her.*)

DANILLO (*cont.*): Thank you, but I prefer to stand . . .

ANNA (*regretfully*): Oh dear, *must* you? . . . You look so very forbidding . . .

DANILLO: That's exactly what I am! Forbidding you to marry de Rosillon!

ANNA (*indignantly*): Forbidding? (*More gently*): Why?

DANILLO: Erm . . . because.

ANNA (*spiritedly*): I can tell you why! You're forbidding me to marry Camille because you love me!

DANILLO: What? . . . I love you? (*He laughs uproariously in a forced manner, and sits down.*)

ANNA (*jumping up*): Oh, for goodness' sake stop laughing like a half-wit!

DANILLO (*angrily*): I am a half-wit!—for allowing myself to get into this—this—

ANNA: Just tell me why you forbid me to marry Camille!