

# The Stage

By

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Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

As the actors are performing on the stage of the opera house, all eyes of the crowd are turned to one private viewing box in the lower balcony section where a patron is being passionate with a frisky young lady. The audience is abuzz, and is amazed at the public display of affection which has drawn the ire of the stage performers. One of the actors, a ruggedly handsome young man, speaks out to the amorous couple to denounce their display as it is taking away from the stage performance, admonishing them to take their bawdy show to the back streets and alleyways.

From a balcony opposite the young couple comes a voice;

**Patron:** (laughing, contempt filled, condescending voice) “Ah, let them be, they are but newlyweds partaking in what newly married people do best, and most often, making love! Besides, theirs is a site better show than the piffle and tripe which you, a mere third rate ‘actor’ are presenting to us as supposed ‘art’!”

The crowd snickers, there is quiet sporadic applause with some members calling out “Here, here!”

The actor on stage calls out once again, but this time to the patron who has cast the insult;

**Actor:** (professionally restrained yet obviously angry) “Sir, I resent your characterizing of myself and my colleagues as ‘third rate’ and the show as ‘tripe’! If you are in disagreement with it, you are free to leave, I’m sure that as the first act has yet to conclude, the owner of this fine establishment would gladly refund your money.”

The noisy couple that started the interruption, by this time, has arisen and slipped out the back of their box.

**Patron:** (laughingly yet insulted) “I do not wish a refund, sir, but simply for a better class of performance!”

**Actor:** (with slight contempt in his voice) “Well then, since our lovebirds have taken the opportunity granted by this distraction to make their exit, most likely to a seedy rooming house to further satiate their bawdy urges, we may proceed with the performance, and I hope it will be to your liking.”

**Patron:** (in a stage whisper to his companion) “It won’t.”

The actor on stage has heard this remark but does not acknowledge it, only shooting the patron a sidelong look of contempt and disgust.

As the show proceeds, the crowd slowly settles in and forgets the disruption. Suddenly, an egg comes flying to the stage from the balconies hitting the actor squarely on the side of the head. The show stops as all eyes turn to where the incredibly accurate missile came from. It was thrown by the patron from the earlier exchange who is now, with his guest, laughing uproariously at the site on the stage before him.

**Actor:** (quite angrily) “You, sir, are an *ass*, and I demand an apology *this instant!*”

**Patron:** (un-apologetically laughing) “He ‘demands’ an apology, HA! I’m not sorry, and even if I was, I’ve never apologized in my life!”

**Actor:** “If you will not apologize, then I demand satisfaction! Step down here and draw your sword... unless, you are a *coward!*”

**Patron:** (angrily) “I resent that remark! I am no coward, sir, and this I shall prove here tonight before this gathering of witnesses. Steel yourself as I shall be down shortly and you shall pay for your insolence!.”

The patron disappears to the back of his box to make his way to the stage. The crowd is abuzz as the actor straps on his sword. Someone steps from the wings and speaks to the actor who, as he readies for battle, stops for an instant before continuing to fasten the belt of his sheath. The individual quickly leaves the stage after informing the actor that the patron he is about to duel with is a master swordsman, the best in the land who is despised by many in the community, both by those with and without money, as being an arrogant bully.

As the patron enters the stage, sporadic applause erupts from the crowd, he takes an appreciative bow and makes his way to where the actor awaits him. The two opponents square off at center stage with weapons drawn and looks of steely resolve on their faces.

**Actor:** (contemptuously, dismissively) “I hear tell that you are the best swordsman of this land, is that so?”

**Patron:** (smugly boastful) “Yes it is, and I will understand if you wish to drop this pithy show of bravado and apologize for the insult”

**Actor:** (taken aback, angry) “I have not insulted you, sir, it is ‘I’ who have been insulted! And unlike you, sir, I ‘do’ apologize, but only when I am wrong. I shall not yield in this matter until my honor has been satisfied. Now raise your sword and prepare to meet your maker, if you believe in one!”

**Patron:** (angrily, impatiently and dismissive) “Oh, I believe in the creator alright, but it is you who will be meeting yours... In the bowls of Hell!”

As he finishes his reply, the patron launches into battle at the actor who is only slightly surprised and is pushed back.

A fierce and pitched battle is fought on the stage with first one, then the other opponent gaining the upper hand for brief moments at a time. Ropes are cut, props are destroyed and fall. At one point they are fighting in the wings and behind the stage, the next, they are back on the stage and then down in the orchestra pit causing the other actors and members of the orchestra to scatter out of the way.

Both sides are well matched and neither side can gain the upper hand for little more than a few moments at a time. After several long minutes of fighting, the two begin to show signs of tiring. Sweating and somewhat out of breath, the patron seems to have a slight upper hand but both sides have been bloodied by the battle with the patron suffering a slash to his left arm and the actor, a gash to his chest and leg.

After several more minutes of battle, the patron is now losing and is forced to the floor after stumbling over a fallen stage prop. As he gathers himself up and searches with his eyes for his weapon, the actor slowly approaches, his weapon in hand, outstretched at the ready.

**Actor:** (breathing hard, slightly pleading) “We can end this now, you and I. Yield your sword and apologize. I will let you leave here with your dignity and shall hold you no grudge for a match well fought.”

The patron, glancing around for his weapon, has spotted his sword. As the actor approaches, the patron sneaks a hand into his pocket, hoping his move has not been noticed. Once the actor is within reach, his sword a mere 6 inches from his face, the patron quickly withdraws his hand and flings an unknown powder at the actor.

**Patron:** (defiantly, flinging the powder and jumping quickly to his feet) “*Never!* As I told you before, I *never* apologize!”

The patron scrambles over to his weapon as the actor reels back shielding his eyes with his arm and the back of his hand. As the crowd gasps in astonishment at this sudden display as the patron quickly regains his weapon and rushes at the actor, his back turned as he tries to clear his eyes of the dirt flung their by his adversary. A female audience member shouts “Look Out!”, but it is a tad to late as the patron makes another slash at the actor, cutting him well and deep across the full of his shoulders and back.

**Patron:** (smugly angrily with contempt) “I told you, I don’t apologize, especially to third rate actors, and I *never* give up!”

The fight continues at a renewed, feverish pitch for several more moments until the actor makes a quick movement out of the way as the patron lunges at him with a death blow, while he is backed to a pile of crates at the side of the stage, and he is free. As the actor moves out of the way, the patron stumbles to regain his balance as the expected resistance of his weapon penetrating his foe was not met, and he falls into the crates. As the patron turns around to get up, he is met by the steely glare of the actor, his eyes ablaze in anger, his sword drawn to the patrons chest. A single word is spoken by the actor. One, spoken slowly, deliberately and in a hoarse, almost breathless croak of restrained rage.

**Actor:** (through clenched teeth) “Yield!”

An icy hush falls over the audience. The patron and actor, now breathing hard, stare at one another in rapt silence. The actor, standing firm, angry and unyielding. The patron, slouched, bent almost backwards over a crate, one hand steadying himself, the other still plaintively grasping his weapon, now limp at his side. He is beaten.

The actor again appeals to the beaten patron in a voice at once firm yet raging.

**Actor:** (with stiffened jaw) “Yield your weapon, I shall not ask it again.”

The actor moves slightly closer as he speaks to the patron, his sword tip resting gently on the patrons heaving chest, both men breathing hard.

**Actor:** (continuing...) Put it down now and I shall let you live. Refuse, and I shall show you no mercy. You will either walk out of here alive, or I swear to you this night shall be the last night of your life as you will die by my hand here this very instant!

As the actor speaks his pleading words to the patron, he moves slowly closer. From a distance of outstretched arm to a close, elbow bent, sword pommel resting near his own chest distance with both of his hands on the sword handle as if ready to thrust a final blow. The patron slowly tries for a better grip on his own weapon bringing it up to his side with an outstretched arm. As the actor finishes speaking, there is a pause, brief and quiet, as if no one is breathing. The patron makes a sudden slight move, bending his arm and bringing his sword closer in beside him as if readying to strike. The crowd inhales sharply as the actor quickly moves his blade tip from the patrons chest, just over his heart, up to the nape of his throat. The patron stops suddenly. The actor again speaks, leaning in closer to the patrons face.

**Actor:** (pleadingly through clenched teeth) “You are beaten, sir, put down your sword. I do not wish to spill your blood, but if you do not yield your weapon, then by the gods, I shall put you to death where you are like a common mongrel.

The patron looks at the actor, gradually lowers his eyes in shame and slowly drops his sword to the floor. The actor stands, slowly, and for a moment, looks down at his vanquished foe with pity as the audience begins to breathe again. He then turns, and slowly walks away, his shoulders slightly slumped and weapon at his side. The patron slumps pitifully to the floor as the audience begins to slowly, sporadically clap and some cheer "Bravo!" as if they believed what they had just witnessed was part of the play.

Suddenly, as the actor is almost to center stage, and some twenty feet or so from the final battle, a woman in the audience lets out a terrified shriek! The patron, who had been slumped, beaten on the floor, had drawn a large knife from within his coat and was lunging at full run at the actor, a look of animalistic anger flashing in his eyes. At hearing the scream, the actor quickly turns and instinctively raises his sword outstretched to shoulder height to defend himself. The crowd grows silent as the patron, at full rage, sees this move but, alas, he is too late. As the patron attempts to draw himself to a stop, he realizes he is too close as the blade of the actor's sword plunges deep into his throat as he falls forward forcing it almost all the way through his neck.

The actor looks with disgust and pity down his sword at the impaled patron, his gaze unwavering. The startled patron looks back in pained, silent horror, his mouth agape as blood gushes forth from the mortal wound in his neck, bubbles and gurgles coming from his mouth as he tries to breathe and move his mouth in a pitiful attempt to speak the only sound. The patron, standing silently, his gaze moves slowly from the unyielding, face of the man who has just taken his life, down to the sword impaled in his throat. He slowly lowers his knife to his side, then drops it to the floor and painfully raises his arms to grasp the blade as if in a fruitless effort to remove the cold, hard steel from his weakening body as he drops slowly to his knees his gaze never wavering from the blade which the actor is clinging, unyieldingly to. The patron, now on his knees, slowly leans back, slightly, and his gaze moves plaintively up to the face of the actor whose look has dissolved from one of anger and disgusted pity to one of pity for a dying man. The patron's gaze fixes on the actor and then, slowly it wavers as though he were looking behind or beyond the man. He slowly turns his head to the audience, removing a hand from the sword, and faintly gestures in a sweep as the blade glides slowly from his flesh and he slumps over on his side on the floor, dead, in a pool of his arrogant lives blood.

The silent crowd grows restless, then slowly breaks out in applause and cheering at the death of a man many of them despised. The actor stands, his arms limp, sword in hand, a look of horror on his face as he thinks to himself 'what have I done?', as he gazes at his victim's lifeless body lying in a growing crimson pool of blood. The body has been joined by the figure of a woman who, weeping and wailing, throws herself at the limp and lifeless man. She had been with the patron in his private balcony box earlier that evening.

As the crowd cheers and boisterously applauds, the actor draws himself up, wheels around to the crowd, arms and sword raised in defiance, and in the loud, gruff and growling voice of disgusted, indignant anger he barks at the crowd.

**Actor:** “*ENOUGH!*”

The crowd is startled into silence.

**Actor:** (continuing in restrained rage...) “A mans life has been brought to a harsh and needless end here tonight, have you no decency, no pity?! To applaud such an act is an utter disgrace!”

**Actor:** (turning to the woman and continuing in a softer more gentle tone...) “And to you, good lady, I do offer these bittersweet words in condolence, your champion fought well, hard and with great skill, for that be proud. I hold him no grudge for a match well drawn. He did make but one simple error, that, in letting arrogance and pride take their place and over rule his skills and better judgement, if not for that the battle would have been won earlier with he the victor and I the vanquished, lying in a pool of mine own life here on the floor instead of him. I do pray that you find solace in these words, I expect no quarter or forgiveness from you. I am proud to have met and battled this worthy opponent but I am not proud that the end and my victory had to come at such a high, bloody price. Take your friend and burry him knowing that I do forgive him for what he has done.”

The crowd and all present are silent, except for the lone woman crying over the body, as the actor half tosses, half drops his sword at his side as he walks, dejected, beaten and sullen, from the stage and disappears into the wings.

### The Stage

A brief flash of inspiration put to paper.

Based on a brief, vivid flash of mental imagery.

### Copyright

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