

SCENE V.

LADY WISHFORT, FOIBLE.

LADY. O Foible, where hast thou been? What hast thou been doing?

FOIB. Madam, I have seen the party.

LADY. But what hast thou done?

FOIB. Nay, 'tis your ladyship has done, and are to do; I have only promised. But a man so enamoured--so transported! Well, if worshipping of pictures be a sin--poor Sir Rowland, I say.

LADY. The miniature has been counted like. But hast thou not betrayed me, Foible? Hast thou not detected me to that faithless Mirabell? What hast thou to do with him in the park? Answer me, has he got nothing out of thee?

FOIB. So, the devil has been beforehand with me; what shall I say?- -Alas, madam, could I help it, if I met that confident thing? Was I in fault? If you had heard how he used me, and all upon your ladyship's account, I'm sure you would not suspect my fidelity. Nay, if that had been the worst I could have borne: but he had a fling at your ladyship too, and then I could not hold; but, i'faith I gave him his own.

LADY. Me? What did the filthy fellow say?

FOIB. O madam, 'tis a shame to say what he said, with his taunts and his fleers, tossing up his nose. Humh, says he, what, you are a-hatching some plot, says he, you are so early abroad, or catering, says he, ferreting for some disbanded officer, I warrant. Half pay is but thin subsistence, says he. Well, what pension does your lady propose? Let me see, says he, what, she must come down pretty deep now, she's superannuated, says he, and -

LADY. Ods my life, I'll have him--I'll have him murdered. I'll have him poisoned. Where does he eat? I'll marry a drawer to have him poisoned in his wine. I'll send for Robin from Locket's-- immediately.

FOIB. Poison him? Poisoning's too good for him. Starve him, madam, starve him; marry Sir Rowland, and get him disinherited. Oh, you would bless yourself to hear what he said.

LADY. A villain; superannuated?

FOIB. Humh, says he, I hear you are laying designs against me too, says he, and Mrs. Millamant is to marry my uncle (he does not suspect a word of your ladyship); but, says he, I'll fit you for that, I warrant you, says he, I'll hamper you for that, says he, you and your old frippery too, says he, I'll handle you -

LADY. Audacious villain! Handle me? Would he durst? Frippery? Old frippery? Was there ever such a foul-mouthed fellow? I'll be married to-morrow, I'll be contracted to-night.

FOIB. The sooner the better, madam.

LADY. Will Sir Rowland be here, say'st thou? When, Foible?

FOIB. Incontinently, madam. No new sheriff's wife expects the return of her husband after knighthood with that impatience in which Sir Rowland burns for the dear hour of kissing your ladyship's hand after dinner.

LADY. Frippery? Superannuated frippery? I'll frippery the villain; I'll reduce him to frippery and rags, a tatterdemalion!--I hope to see him hung with tatters, like a Long Lane pent-house, or a gibbet thief. A slander-mouthed railer! I warrant the spendthrift prodigal's in debt as much as the million lottery, or the whole court upon a birthday. I'll spoil his credit with his tailor. Yes, he shall have my niece with her fortune, he shall.

FOIB. He? I hope to see him lodge in Ludgate first, and angle into Blackfriars for brass farthings with an old mitten.

LADY. Ay, dear Foible; thank thee for that, dear Foible. He has put me out of all patience. I shall never recompose my features to receive Sir Rowland with any economy of face. This wretch has fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.

FOIB. Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white vernish.

LADY. Let me see the glass. Cracks, say'st thou? Why, I am arrantly flayed: I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes, or I shall never keep up to my picture.

FOIB. I warrant you, madam: a little art once made your picture like you, and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam.

LADY. But art thou sure Sir Rowland will not fail to come? Or will a not fail when he does come? Will he be importunate, Foible, and push? For if he should not be importunate I shall never break decorums. I shall die with confusion if I am forced to advance--oh no, I can never advance; I shall swoon if he should expect advances. No, I hope Sir Rowland is better bred than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms. I won't be too coy neither--I won't give him despair. But a little disdain is not amiss; a little scorn is alluring.

FOIB. A little scorn becomes your ladyship.

LADY. Yes, but tenderness becomes me best--a sort of a dyingness. You see that picture has a sort of a--ha, Foible? A swimmingness in the eyes. Yes, I'll look so. My niece affects it; but she wants features. Is Sir Rowland handsome? Let my toilet be removed--I'll dress above. I'll receive Sir Rowland here. Is he handsome? Don't answer me. I won't know; I'll be surprised. I'll be taken by surprise.

FOIB. By storm, madam. Sir Rowland's a brisk man.

LADY. Is he? Oh, then, he'll importune, if he's a brisk man. I shall save decorums if Sir Rowland importunes. I have a mortal terror at the apprehension of offending against decorums. Oh, I'm glad he's a brisk man. Let my things be removed, good Foible.