

## **A Long Time Ago**

BY FLOYD DELL  
A TRAGIC FANTASY

TO BROR NORDFELDT

"A Long Time Ago" was first produced by the Provincetown Players, New York City, in 1917, with the following cast:

The Old Woman ..... Miriam Kiper The Fool.....  
Duncan MacDougal The Queen..... Ida Rauh The  
Sailor..... George Cram Cook The Prince.....  
Pendleton King

*The courtyard of a palace. On one side, broad steps, and a door, leading to the palace. On the other, steps leading downward. At the back, a rose-arbour, and in front of it a wide seat.*

*On the steps before the door a fool is sitting, plucking at a musical instrument. On the lower steps stands an old woman, richly dressed.*

THE OLD WOMAN. Why do you sit there, fool, and twang at that harp? There's no occasion for making music. Nobody has been winning any battles. How long has it been since a great fight was heard of?

THE FOOL. If there had been a battle, old woman, they would have had to get some one besides myself to celebrate the winning of it. I do not like fighting.

THE OLD WOMAN. What does a scrawny little weakling like you know of fighting, and why should you have an opinion?

THE FOOL. The days of fighting are over, and a good thing it is, too. Four kingdoms we have about us, that in the bloody old days we

would be for ever marching against, and they against us, killing and burning and destroying the crops till a quiet man would be sick to think of it. But that's all past. Twenty years we have been at peace with them, and that's ever since the young queen was born, and I hope it may last as long as she lives.

THE OLD WOMAN. There's no stopping a fool when he starts to talk. But it is right you are that the good old days are gone. Those were the days of great heroes, like the father of her that is now Queen. They were fine men that stood beside him, and one was my own man. I said to him, "This is the time a brave man is sure to be killed. If you come back to me, I'll always think you were a coward." He died along with a thousand of the best men in the kingdom fighting around the King. That was a great day. Four kingdoms at once we fought, and beat them to their knees. Glad enough they were to make peace with the child of that dead king.

THE FOOL. Spare me, woman. I've heard that old story often enough. What do you suppose all that fighting was for, if it wasn't to put an end to quarrelling for all time? If the old King was alive now, he'd sit in his palace and drink his ale and listen to music, and when he saw the young men giving kisses to the young women under the trees he'd be glad enough. But you still go cawing for blood, like an old crow.

THE OLD WOMAN. I'll not talk to such a one. You can see with your own eyes that our enemies are strong and prosperous. We let them into the kingdom with their silks and their satins and their jewels to sell. They walk about the city here and laugh to themselves, thinking how they will spoil and destroy everything soon. It may be this year, it may be next year. If the old King were alive, he'd never have let them get half so strong. He would have kept them in fear of us, and trained up a fine band of heroes, too, making raids on them once in a while. There's the city that shoves itself right up against our borders--I can see our men coming home from the spoiling of it, all red with spilt wine and blood. . . .

THE FOOL. You're a disgusting old woman. If I hear any more of that talk, I'm likely to slap the face of you, even if you are the Queen's nurse. Go away before you spoil my afternoon.

THE OLD WOMAN. I could speak to the Queen and have you beaten, do you know that?

THE FOOL. Woman, go away. I do not want to be bothered by the old and the garrulous. I am composing a love-song.

THE OLD WOMAN. Has any one ever loved you, I would like to know? Now if it were that young prince who is staying with us, he would have some right to make love-songs--if what they say is true, that every woman he meets on his journey falls in love with him. Even our own Queen, I am thinking. But only three days does he stay in any place, and then he is up and gone on his long journey that nobody understands the reason or the end of, from the east to the west. He is too wise to be held by such toys as love.

THE FOOL. Then he is more a fool than I.

THE OLD WOMAN. Who should know about love, if not a man who has been loved by many women and by great queens? But you, what do you know about it?

THE FOOL. The trouble with the old is that they forget so many things. I am sorry for you, woman. You think yourself wise, but the fool that sits at the Queen's doorstep and looks at her as she passes, and she never seeing him at all, is wiser than you.

THE OLD WOMAN. I have wasted enough words with you. I will go away and sit in the sun and think of the days when there were heroes.

*She goes.*

THE FOOL. And I will make a song about love. I will make a song about the love that is too high for pride and too deep for shame.

*The door has opened, and the young Queen stands looking down at him.*

THE QUEEN. What is that, fool? What are the words you are saying?

THE FOOL. (*kneeling*) I was speaking of a love that is too high for pride and too deep for shame.

THE QUEEN. And whose love is that, fool?

THE FOOL. It is the love of all who really love, and it is the only love worth making a song about.

THE QUEEN. (*smiling*) And how do you come to be so wise as to know about such things?

THE FOOL. I know because I am a fool.

THE QUEEN. I am well answered. And you are not the only fool in the world, I am thinking. But tell me, fool, have you seen any of the Prince's men here?

THE FOOL. No, but I have heard that the ship is being got ready for sailing. . . .

THE QUEEN. (*rebukingly*) I did not ask you that. (*She is about to go, but turns back, and gives him a piece of money.*) This is for you to buy wine with and get drunken. You are not amusing when you are sober. (*She starts to go, but turns again.*) Fool, do you believe in magic?

THE FOOL. I have heard that the old wizard who lives in a cave down by the shore is able to rouse storms and keep vessels from sailing.....

THE QUEEN. (*looking at him, for a moment fixedly*) I have a great mind to have you poisoned. Here, take this, and remember that I said to be drunken.

*She gives him another piece of money, and goes off by way of the rose-trellised passage-way. A sailor comes up the steps.*

THE SAILOR. Fool, where is the Prince?

THE FOOL. I do not know, sailor, but I can tell you what I think.

THE SAILOR. What difference does it make what you think? I have a message to deliver to him.

THE FOOL. I think that the Queen has sung him to sleep, and that he has not yet awakened.

THE SAILOR. It is likely enough. But I have been sent by the captain, and I must see him.

THE FOOL. You look hot.

THE SAILOR. I am so hot and thirsty that I could drink a barrelful of wine. It is well enough for the Prince to lie about and eat and drink and be sung to by pretty women, but we sailors have work to do. This business of staying only three days in each port disgusts me. No sooner do we get ashore than we have to go back on board again. I saw a girl yesterday, a beauty, and not afraid of a man. There must be many like that here, but what good does it do me? I spent all my money on her, and now I can't even get a drink. It's a shame.

THE FOOL. Would you like a drink?

THE SAILOR. Fool, don't make a mock of my thirst, or I'll twist your neck.

THE FOOL. Look at this. (*Shows him a coin.*)

THE SAILOR. What a piece of luck! Is it real money? Where did you get it?

THE FOOL. Your prince gave it to me, and said I was to treat any of his sailors that I came across.

THE SAILOR. Then it's all right. Why didn't you say so before? Come along. If you were as thirsty as I am--!

*They go down the steps. The door opens, and the Prince comes out. He looks up and down.*

THE PRINCE. And now begins again my long journey from the east to the west. . . .

*The old woman appears.*

THE OLD WOMAN. Well, have you waked at last?

THE PRINCE. You are a bitter-tongued old woman. But for all that, I think you are my friend. Perhaps the only friend I have here.

THE OLD WOMAN. You are right. For all that you sleep your holiday away, you are a brave man. And I am the only one in this kingdom that thinks well of bravery. The rest want to smother it with kisses.

THE PRINCE. True enough. I feel that already I am becoming soft. Never before have I been unwilling to leave a city--

THE OLD WOMAN. Or a Queen. . . .

THE PRINCE. I must go on board ship. Is it ready, I wonder? The captain promised to send word to me. . . .

THE OLD WOMAN. Yes, it is time you went, before they have made a lapdog of you.

THE PRINCE. You speak very freely. Are you not afraid of the Queen?

THE OLD WOMAN. She does not know what she is doing. She has grown up in a base time of peace, and she does not understand that it is not a man's business to sleep and drink wine and exchange kisses with pretty queens. She would turn you from your purpose--

THE PRINCE. My purpose? What do you know of my purpose?

THE OLD WOMAN. I have not guessed your secret. But I know that you are not merely taking a pleasure journey. I have seen heroes, and you have the eyes of one. The end of all this journeying from the east

to the west is something great and terrible--and I will not have you turned aside.

THE PRINCE. Something great and terrible....Yes....

THE OLD WOMAN. You have the look of one who does not care for rest or peace or the love of a woman for more than a day. But there is a weakness in you, too. If you would go, go quickly.

THE PRINCE. I wonder why the sailor does not come. It looks like a storm.

*The sky has become ominously dark.*

THE OLD WOMAN. Would a storm hold you back?

THE PRINCE. Is that what you think of me, old woman?

THE OLD WOMAN. Well, we shall see what stuff you are made of....

*She shuffles off. The Queen enters.*

THE QUEEN. (*coming up to him, tenderly*) When did you wake?

THE PRINCE. Did you think your voice had enough magic in it to make me sleep till you returned? We have just time to say farewell.

THE QUEEN. There is a storm coming up. Do you see how black the sky is?

THE PRINCE. I am not afraid of storms.

THE QUEEN. Of course you are not afraid of storms. Did you think you had to prove your bravery?

THE PRINCE. The three days are over.

THE QUEEN. And how quickly!

THE PRINCE. I told you I could stay only three days.

THE QUEEN. I thought you were a king, and could do whatever you chose....

THE PRINCE. I have chosen to stay only three days.

THE QUEEN. In what way have I offended you?

THE PRINCE. I made my choice long ago, before I knew you.

THE QUEEN. And now you are afraid to change your mind?

THE PRINCE. Do you think a brave man changes his mind for pleasure's sake?

THE QUEEN. Forgive me. If it is your happiness to go on, to what end I do not know, I will let you. I do not wish to make you unhappy. But I would give you something to take with you, one more flower of my garden, an unfading rose that shall be like a bright memory of me in your heart always. Will you take it?

*She leads him back into the palace. The sailor enters, supported by the fool.*

THE SAILOR. (*drunkenly*) Where--where is my Prince? I have a message for him.

THE FOOL. So you said. But you haven't finished telling me about that girl. Her eyes were blue, you said.

THE SAILOR. Blue, yes. If I said blue, then blue it was. Or maybe green, or grey. Maybe I'm thinking of the hussy back in the last port we stopped at. It's all the same. Reminds me of a little song. Shall I sing you a little song?

THE FOOL. Another song? Sing away then.

THE SAILOR. First another drink from this flagon. Ah! Now I'm ready. I've often been complimented on my voice. (*Sings*)



We'll go no more a-roving-

No, that's not the one. Let me see. Ah, now I've got it. Listen. (*Sings*)

Blue eyes, grey eyes, green-and-gold eyes, Eyes that question, doubt, deny, Sudden-flashing, cold, hard, bold eyes, Here's your answer: I am I!

Not for you, and not for any, Came I into this man's town-- Barkeep, here's my golden penny, Come who will and drink it down!

I'm not one to lend and borrow, I'm not one to overstay-- I shall go alone tomorrow Whistling, as I came today.

Leave my sword alone, you hussy! There is blood upon the blade-- Dragon-slaying is a messy Sort of trade. Put back the blade!

Take my knee and--O you darling! A man forgets how sweet you are! Snarling dragons--flowing flagons-- Devil take the morning star!

THE FOOL. Bravo!

THE SAILOR. And there you are! If I do say it myself, I have as good a time as the Prince does. One girl's as nice as another--and maybe nicer, at that. What's a Queen? Can she kiss better than any other girl? I've wondered a bit about it. And the conclusion I've come to is... the conclusion I've come to...

THE FOOL. The conclusion you've come to is--?

THE SAILOR. Right you are. Give me that flagon. That's the stuff. What was I saying? The conclusion I've come to is that the Prince can't have any more fun in three days than any other man. Queen or no Queen. Am I right? Tell me, am I right?

THE FOOL. I wouldn't contradict you....

THE SAILOR. No. Of course you wouldn't. You're a good fellow. You're my friend. Where's that flagon? Ah! And now it's your turn to

sing. Sing that little song you sang a while ago. That was a good one. You sing almost as well as I do.

THE FOOL. (*chants*)

In this harsh world and old Why must we cherish Fires that grow not cold  
In hearts that perish?

With the strong floods of hate I cleansed my bosom, But springeth soon and late  
The fiery blossom.

What though some lying tale The mind dissembles? The scarlet lip turns pale,  
The strong hand trembles....

THE SAILOR. No, no, not that one! That one hasn't any tune to it, and it isn't about girls. It's no song at all. I meant the one--you know--about the young widow. How did it go? (*He swigs from the flagon.*) But I mustn't forget the Prince. Where's that Prince?

THE FOOL. Oh, yes, the Prince. Of course. We mustn't forget the Prince. Come along with me. (*He leads the sailor off through the rose-arbour. The door of the palace opens, disclosing the Prince and the Queen.*)

*He clasps her hands and then descends the steps.*

THE QUEEN. Wait!

*She runs down, and tenderly embraces him.*

THE PRINCE. Farewell.

THE QUEEN. Must you go?

THE PRINCE. I shall remember you always.

THE QUEEN. (*bitterly*) I suppose that is enough. . . .

*They come down the steps together.*

THE PRINCE. What is that you say?

THE QUEEN. I say that it is enough that you should think of me sometimes on your long journey from the east to the west. To be remembered--that is the portion of women.

THE PRINCE. You knew what manner of man I was, and that I would not be detained. Why, if you must have the taste of kisses on your lips always, did you not turn to some man of your own land, who would not stray from your side? Why did you give your love to one you had never seen before, and will never see again? I did not ask that you love me. What you gave, I took.

THE QUEEN. I regret nothing that I have given. But I am sorry for you, because you do not understand.

THE PRINCE. It may be that I do not understand. But I know that I may not stay longer in this place. Would you ask me to do otherwise?

THE QUEEN. I would not ask you, no. If you understood, I would have no need of asking. If all things in your life have not changed colour and significance--if I have been to you but as a harlot to one of your sailors,--then leave me.

THE PRINCE. (*confusedly*) It is not true that nothing has changed. My mind is in a turmoil. I am dizzy, I cannot see. I have almost forgotten why I set my heart on this journey. You have bewitched me, and that is why I fear you. If I stay here with you any longer, I shall forget everything. I must go.

THE QUEEN. (*her arms about him*) You have forgotten the meaning of your journey. You will not go.

THE PRINCE. I am going. . . .

*But he allows himself to be led to the harbour seat.*

THE QUEEN. It is too late. You are mine, now, mine for ever. It was for this that you came hither--I am the meaning of your journey. It was ordained that you love me. You must not think of anything else.

THE PRINCE. Why have you done this to me? Are you a witch? I am afraid of you!

*He rises.*

THE QUEEN. I will teach you strange and terrible secrets.

THE PRINCE. I fear you and yet I trust you. What will come of this I do not know. But I care for nothing. Nothing in the world means anything to me now except you. Why is it that I seem to hate you?

*He seizes her and holds her fiercely.*

THE QUEEN. That is because you love me at last.

THE PRINCE. I could kill you.

THE QUEEN. You seek in vain to escape love.

*The sailor staggers in, sees the Prince, and stops.*

THE SAILOR. I am bidden to tell you--

THE PRINCE. Be off!--What is it you say?

*The Queen stands still, with her hands over her face.*

THE SAILOR. The ship is ready.

THE PRINCE. Go!

*The sailor walks away.*

THE QUEEN. (*looking after him*) A word, and you have forgotten me already. A moment ago I thought you loved me. Now I am nothing to you.

THE PRINCE. The ship--

THE QUEEN. It is ready to sail. They are waiting for you. Why do you not go?

THE PRINCE. I am sorry. But it is as you say. The ship is ready to sail. I must go.

THE QUEEN. Go quickly.

THE PRINCE. Farewell, then.

THE QUEEN. No, stay. (*She throws herself at his feet, and clasps his knees.*) See, I beg you to stay. I have no shame left. I beg you. Stay even though you despise me. Stay even though you hate me. I do not care. I will be your slave, your bondwoman. I cannot let you go.

*She puts her head in her hands, and weeps.*

THE PRINCE. (*looking down at her*) I am sorry. (*After a pause*) Farewell.

*He touches her lightly on the shoulder, and, looking toward the sea, leaves her. She rises, and watches him with a stony face until he goes.*

*The fool enters.*

THE QUEEN. Are you drunken, fool, as I bade you be?

THE FOOL. I am drunken, yes, but not with wine. I am drunken with bitterness. With the bitterness of love.

THE QUEEN. Of love, fool?

THE FOOL. With the bitterness of love. It will amuse you, and so I will tell you what I mean. It is you that I love.

THE QUEEN. Life grows almost interesting once more. But are you not afraid that I will have you whipped?

THE FOOL. You would have had me whipped a week ago if I had told you this. But now you will not. Now you know what it is to love.  
...

THE QUEEN. My secrets are on a fool's tongue. But what does it matter? Go on.

THE FOOL. Why did I try to keep the man you love from going away? In the hope that one day I should see you kissing him in the garden, and thus I would be spared the trouble of killing myself. In a word, I am a fool. But I have tried to help you. Why did you not keep him?

THE QUEEN. I have been asking that question of my own heart, fool. I would that I had not come to him a virgin and a Queen, but a light woman skilled in all the ways of love. Then perhaps I could have held him. But now he is gone, and the world is black.

THE FOOL. It is not the world, it is your heart that is black. And it is black with hatred. . . .

THE QUEEN. I think you understand, fool. I would set fire to this palace which the King my father built, I would burn it down tonight, save that it would not make light enough to take away the blackness from my heart.

*The sailor again, staggering.*

THE QUEEN. What, has the ship not gone?

THE SAILOR. Gone, and left me behind. Gone, and left me. . . .

THE FOOL. Here is still wine in the flagon.

THE SAILOR. Good. Good. Give it to me.

THE QUEEN. *(to the fool)* First bring it to me. *(She takes off a ring, and dips it in the wine. To the fool)*--I have spoken lightly of poisoning today. Now I think I will try it. I would like to see a man die. It will ease me a little. Come!

*The sailor comes and takes it from her hands, while the fool stares fascinated.*

THE QUEEN. How does it taste?

THE SAILOR. *(suddenly straightening up, no longer drunk)* Bitter. What was in it?

THE QUEEN. The bitterness of my heart. It will kill you.

THE SAILOR. I have been poisoned. *(He puts his hand to his side.)* I am dying. But first--!

*He draws a short sword, and runs at her. The fool starts up, but the Queen motions him away, and waits. When the sailor is almost upon her, he stops, throws up his hands, drops his sword, and falls in a heap.*

THE QUEEN. *(after a moment, going up, and touching the body with her foot)* Dead. So that is what it is like?

THE FOOL. *(trembling)* Do you find it so interesting?

THE QUEEN. No--my heart is already aching with its emptiness again.... What shall I do?

THE FOOL. You might poison me, too. I think I would die in a more original manner than that silly sailor. Yes, I would seize you in my arms and kiss you before I died.

THE QUEEN. That would be amusing. But it is a pity to waste kisses on a dying man. And besides, you are the only one in my kingdom who understands me. I must have you alive to talk to.

THE FOOL. There are strange stories about the kisses of queens.

THE QUEEN. Tell them to me.

THE FOOL. There is an old saying that three kisses bestowed by a queen upon a fool will make a hero of him.

THE QUEEN. That might be interesting. I think I will try it. Come to me, do not be afraid. This day I have given my kisses to a man who thought no more of them than that dead sailor there of the kisses of a harlot. What, must you kneel? Well, then, upon your forehead.

*She kisses him upon the forehead as he kneels.*

*He slowly rises, and as he rises he takes on dignity. His fool's cap is dropped aside, he picks up the dead sailor's sword and girds it on him.*

THE QUEEN. Ah, it is true. There is magic in it. You are handsome, too. I am not sorry to have kissed you.

*The old woman comes in.*

THE QUEEN. Well, what is the news? The ship has sailed, has it not?

THE OLD WOMAN. Straight into the sunset. (*She sees the dead man, and looks at the Queen and at the fool.*) Who killed him?

THE QUEEN. I killed him. He was left behind, and I do not like to have strangers about.

THE OLD WOMAN. It is a good omen. I have not seen a dead man for twenty years, save those that died of sickness and old age. When shall we have the good old times when men killed each other with swords? I feel that it is coming. When shall we fall upon the four kingdoms, and tear them to pieces?

THE QUEEN. Ah, that is an idea. That would be something to do.

THE FOOL. Hush your croakings, old woman, and tell us the news that you have come with.

THE OLD WOMAN. How do you know that I come with news? Where is your cap, fool?



THE FOOL. Speak, or be gone.

THE QUEEN. Beware of this man, for I have been making a hero out of him.

THE OLD WOMAN. Are you mad?

THE QUEEN. Yes, I am mad, so beware of me, too, and tell your news,

THE OLD WOMAN. (*tamed*) It is only that a boat has been seen to put out from the ship, and is coming back to shore.

THE QUEEN. It is doubtless a present for me. The Prince has bethought himself to pay me for my kindness to him. Go, and give orders that any men who are in the boat are to be brought to me, with their hands tied behind them, that I may decide what punishment to inflict upon them. Let it be understood that we do not like strangers in this kingdom.

THE OLD WOMAN. (*grimly*) It shall be as you say.

*She goes out.*

THE QUEEN. And now I must finish my quaint task. It pleases me to be kissing fools. I think it is becoming a habit of mine. Come to this garden bench, where he and I sat together, and I will kiss you upon the mouth, as I kissed him. Does it hurt you for me to say that? Good. (*They sit down.*) You are the only one in the kingdom who understands me. Lift up your head. (*She kisses him. He lifts his head proudly, and sits beside her like a king.*) You are silent. Why do you not say something appropriate?

THE FOOL. What I have to say will be with my sword, and your enemies will be the ones to hear it.

THE QUEEN. Ah, I forgot, it is a hero I am making out of you, and all a hero can do is fight. That is a stupid thing. I am sorry now that I kissed you.

THE FOOL. You will not be sorry when I have destroyed your enemies.

THE QUEEN. Now you are beginning to talk like my old nurse. It is well enough to fight, but it should be for amusement, and not with such seriousness. I have only succeeded in making you dull. You were better as a fool.

*The Prince enters, with his hands tied behind him, conducted by some soldiers.*

THE PRINCE. (*Indignantly*) Why am I treated in this fashion?

THE QUEEN. So it is you?

*She looks at him quietly.*

THE PRINCE. (*haughtily*) Order that these bonds be taken from my wrists.

THE QUEEN. We do not like strangers in this country. You were tied by my command, and brought here that I might decide what punishment to mete out to you. Look, this was one of your men. (*Pointing to the dead body*) Carry it away.

*The soldiers carry off the body.*

THE PRINCE. Are you mad?

THE QUEEN. So it would seem. (*To the fool*) Now cut his bonds.

THE FOOL. He is a brave man, and does not deserve to be treated in this manner.

THE PRINCE. Who are you that you should plead for me? Have I not seen you with a fool's cap?

THE FOOL. And now you see me with a sword.

*He cuts the Prince's bonds.*

THE PRINCE. Leave us. I wish to speak with the Queen.

THE QUEEN. *(to the fool)* No, stay. *(To the Prince)* It is not necessary for you to speak. You wish to tell me that the kisses you had from me were so sweet that you would like to buy some more, and are willing to put off your journey for a while.

THE PRINCE. I have given up my journey for ever. I know that the only thing that is real in all the world is love. You are scornful. But I have neither pride nor shame. I kneel at your feet, and beg you to forgive me for my folly.

*He kneels.*

THE QUEEN. It is a pretty speech. But you are too late. I have forgotten you. While they were tying your hands, I was kissing this man upon the mouth.

THE PRINCE. *(springing up)* It is a lie!

THE FOOL. Did you say that the Queen lies?

*He draws his sword.*

THE PRINCE. I do not fight with fools. *(To the Queen)* Send him away, and have him beaten.

THE QUEEN. Are you not willing to fight with him for me?

THE PRINCE. What do you mean?

THE QUEEN. I mean that I have a new appetite, the appetite for death. I have held myself too lightly, I have gone too willingly to the arms of a chance lover. Now there must be blood to sweeten the kisses.

THE PRINCE. Do you wish this fellow killed?

THE QUEEN. Or you. It makes no difference--not the least. What are my kisses, that I should be careful to whom they go?

THE PRINCE. You speak strangely, and I hardly know you. I have come back as a lover and not as a butcher.

THE QUEEN. My whim has changed--I am in the mood for butchers, now.

THE PRINCE. Say but one word to show that you still love me!

THE QUEEN. I have no word to say.

THE PRINCE. Doubt makes my sword heavy. . . .

THE FOOL. And have you nothing to say to me?

THE QUEEN. You remind me. Come. I must finish what I have begun.

*She kisses him on the mouth--the third kiss.*

THE PRINCE. (*covering his eyes*) It is I that am mad.

THE FOOL. Come, if you are not afraid.

*They go out, the Prince giving one long look at the Queen, whose face remains hard.*

*It has become a dark twilight.*

THE QUEEN. They told me that love was like this--but I laughed, and did not believe.

*The old woman comes in.*

THE QUEEN. I have sent him out to die.

THE OLD WOMAN. The fool?

THE QUEEN. No, no, no, my lover, my beloved. I tortured him and denied him, and sent him out to die.

THE OLD WOMAN. It is well enough. Death is among us again, and the old times have come back.

*There are sounds of fighting, and the women wait in silence. Then the sounds cease, and slowly the soldiers bear in a dead body, which they lay on the steps. They affix torches to either side of the palace door, and go out.*

THE FOOL. (*going up to the Queen, and holding out his sword to her, hilt-foremost*) I have done your bidding, and slain a brave man. Bid some one take this sword and slay me.

THE OLD WOMAN. What a faint heart you are! The fool's cap is on you still. Put back your sword in your scabbard. You will make a soldier yet.

THE QUEEN. You are a brave man. Put back your sword in your scabbard, and may it destroy all my enemies from this day forth.

THE FOOL. What shall I do?

THE QUEEN. I have created you, and now I must give you work to do. You can only fight. Very well, then. Take my soldiers, and lead them to the kingdom that thrusts its chief city against our kingdom's walls. There should be good fighting, and much spoil. When the soldiers have glutted themselves with wine and women, let the city be set on fire. I shall look every night for a light in the sky, and when it comes I shall know it is my bonfire. Perhaps it will light up my heart for a moment. When that is finished, I shall find you other bloody work. Go.

THE FOOL. I understand. You shall have your bonfire. Come, old woman, I want some of your advice.

THE OLD WOMAN. The good old days have come back. Ah, the smell of blood!

*They go out.*

*The queen looks over at the dead man lying on the steps between the torches, and gradually her face softens. She goes over slowly, and kneels by his side, gazing on him. She kisses his mouth, and then rises, goes slowly to the arbour, and sits down. She looks away, and her face becomes hard again.*

*A sound of trumpets and shouting, the menacing prelude of war, is heard outside.*