

TWICE A KISS

An Operetta in One Act

Libretto by Maurice Holt

Music by Peter Tranchell

Dramatis Personae

- SIR ROBERT ASYMPTOTE, a pompous knight, a would-be playwright and a jealous husband, although secretly given to amours. (baritone)
- SIR PETER PARALLEL, a gallant, in debt to Sir Robert. (tenor)
- MR. HONEYWOOD, an actor and the proprietor of a playhouse. (bass)
- KNIPP, house-boy to Sir Robert. (baritone)
- LADY ASYMPTOTE, suspicious of her husband's predilections. (soprano)
- SARAH, orphan ward to Sir Robert, who would wed her to Sir Peter so that the debt might be paid from her inheritance. (contralto)
- SUSAN, my Lady Asymptote's maid: a frolicsome piece. (mezzo soprano)

SCENE: a chamber in Sir Robert's house; London, 1670.

PLAYING TIME: forty-five minutes approximately.

SCORING: The piece is scored for piano and electronic organ.

MS.Tranchell.2.8

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PROLOGUE

(There is a short musical introduction, during which Knipp enters with pen and ink. The music stops as he stands before the curtain and speaks the Prologue)

Knipp Whereas the art of opera can create
A work that's fit for any gourmet's plate,
The author and composer humbly wish
To offer you a much more trivial dish.
Theirs is a tale occasioned by a letter,
Proceeding, through a kiss, to something better.
The composer begs that you forgive it if
The music sounds a little bit derivative.
The author craves your pardon for a plot so thin;
And both now bid me leave you, that we may begin.

(Exit Knipp)

RECITATIVE (Susan, Sarah)

(The music begins again, and the curtains part to reveal a chamber in Sir Robert Asymptote's London house. There are a table, some chairs and a screen at the back. There are doors at either side of the stage. After a few bars, Susan enters carrying a letter)

Susan *(Reading)* "My dearest S!" S! For Susan! 'Tis me: 'Tis for me i'
faith! "My dearest S! Meet me outside the Haymarket Playhouse
at nine o' clock to-night, your own true love!" Now *who?* Who
can it be? The paper! Gilt-edged! Why – 'tis from the master
himself! From Sir Robert!

(enter Sarah, carrying a musical box)

Sarah Susan! Susan, pray burn this musical box!

Susan But you had it only yesterday, ma'am, from Sir Timothy Tight!

Sarah It does not please me, and nor does he. In any case, I have
broken it.

(Sarah holds out the musical box, but Susan has the letter in one hand behind her back. She contrives to drop the letter in the rose-bowl. She takes the box, and stops at the door to glance at the rose-bowl and shrug. Exit Susan)

Sarah Another party, another suitor; I am but a prize to be marketed;
I am courted not for myself, but for the wealthy inheritance
that awaits my coming-of-age. Ah, love! Roses for love! (All
covered with bugs, I'll be bound!)

(Sarah smells the roses and finds the letter)

Sarah What is this!

(Sarah takes up the letter and begins to read)

Sarah “My dearest S”. What odious riddle is this? “My dearest S”. Why not write “Sarah” and be done with it? “Meet me at the Haymarket Playhouse, at nine o’ clock to-night, your own true love!” Whose hand is this? The M’s are Sir Peter Parallel’s, But the T’s are Sir Anthony Angle’s, yet, it has the negligence of Sir Jeremy Jowl! No! I wager Sir Peter wrote it in his cups! The dissolute rake! And yet they’re all as bad; All men are rogues! The task is to find one who is not also a bore!

SONG (Sarah)

Sarah Seven weeks ago, while riding down the Row,
Sir Timothy Tight cast glances at me.
Then he came to call, and took me to a ball,
Where foolishly he made advances at me.
When he asked my hand, I didn’t understand;
My guardian, Sir Robert, became quite annoyed at it.
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!
That is what occurred, exactly word for word!
Sir Robert! He, of course, has embroidered it.

Two weeks after that a card fell on the mat.
Sir Anthony Angle had called on me.
Very soon we met, and tho’ he seemed a pet,
Yet, in one evening he had palled on me
Now Sir Peter P. sends little notes to me!
But letters in riddles will not change my mind at all.
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!
No! I’ll not be wed for sake of buttered bread.
There must be some affection behind it all.

Ah, love!

If love should come one day, then it must endure;
No pow’r shall destroy love!
Who knows, this letter may lead to something better?
Pray it be so, that I enjoy love!

RECIT. AND DUET (Sarah, Sir Robert)

Sarah Sir Robert!

(She hides the letter. Enter Sir Robert.)

Sir Robert Ah, Sarah! Are you ready for the party?

Sarah Must I come, sir?

Sir Robert Indeed you must. Mr. Honeywood will be here.

Sarah Mr. Honeywood the actor?

Sir Robert Yes ma'am, the actor, and a great one, too. We shall perform my new play to him, and ev'ryone will have to act a part! Also, Sir Peter Parallel is invited, and will doubtless wish to indicate his affection for you.

Sarah Indicate it he may; but I shall not accept it!

Sir Robert Oons! He has a pleasing countenance and is wealthy (*aside*) But for his debts! (*aloud*) What more is there to it?

Sarah That we should love each other.

Sir Robert Love?!

Sarah Yes! Love will come one day, then it must endure,
No pow'r can destroy love!

(*to herself*) (Who knows, this letter may lead to something better)
Pray it be so, that I enjoy love!

Sir Robert Love's but a sorry word! An empty phrase! D'you hear me?
Love is just a word for an imaginary emotion!
A poet's notion, to say or sing!
It's quite absurd to look for such devotion.
I never heard of such folly, no! Not in all my life!
Love is but a word, Madam, pray you remember this!
Love is not a real thing!

Sarah Ah! You are wrong, Sir!

(*Sarah and Sir Robert repeat the above two stanzas, singing together*)

Sir Robert (*aside*) I shall persuade her!

Sarah (*aside*) I'll get my own way, whatever he says!

(*Exit Sarah*)

Sir Robert Sir Peter has rank, and his uncle is a privy councillor. If I can wed Sarah to Sir Peter, then Sarah's inheritance will enable him to clear his debt to me. Oh, the frustration of having an heiress as a ward! But if I can thus get back the money that Sir Peter owes me, that will give an added eloquence to my suggestion that Mr. Honeywood should present my new play at his theatre! But as for love! Who will marry a girl for love? A man must go gambling and wenching! It's an open secret.

SONG (Sir Robert)

Sir Robert If merry you'd be reckon'd in the reign of Charles the Second,
You have to live a kind of double life.
It doesn't really matter if you're something of a satyr,
Provided that you conceal it from your wife.
Neither ever crows about the things the other knows about-
Pretended lack of knowledge is the thing!
It's a social convention, which, like others I could mention,
Was introduced from Paris by the King!

A man must go gambling and wenching,
For his nature he cannot oppose.
The thing is an open secret,
A secret that ev'ryone knows!

It's wisest to discover if your lady has a lover –
The knowledge gives you licence, so to speak.
Provided that your luck hold, you won't be made a cuckold,
Although, of course, there's one born ev'ry week!
Take a tip from Evelyn, don't publish what you revel in,
But hide it in your diary, free from glance.
It's a simple rule perhaps, but if it should collapse,
The King might have to flee again to France!

A man must go gambling and wenching,
For his nature he cannot oppose.
The thing is an open secret,
A secret that ev'ryone knows!

(Enter Susan with tray of refreshments. Sir Robert meanwhile peruses a copy of his play. Susan looks for the letter in the rose-bowl)

RECIT. AND DUET (Susan, Sir Robert)

Susan It's gone! He must have taken it back!

Sir Robert Make haste Susan! The party must soon begin. We have a busy evening ahead of us.

(Susan lays a cloth on the table, manoeuvring it under all the objects there)

Susan Busy indeed! *(aside)* He makes me coy already! *(aloud)* I hope what you have written, sir, will have a successful outcome!

Sir Robert Ev'ry word is well considered.

Susan And ev'ry letter, I hope!

Sir Robert 'Twill be a good play.

Susan What sort of play is it, sir?

Sir Robert Come closer, girl, I'll show you!

Susan Not now, sir, I've work to do.

Sir Robert No better time than now!

Susan La, sir – you're impatient!

Sir Robert *(aside)* She's a sprightly wench! There's game here!

(Susan proceeds to lay the table with glass-ware, etc. Sir Robert approaches Susan, still holding his play in one hand)

Susan Now the flagons must go just there;
And the glasses – now, don't you dare!

Sir Robert I was merely trying to find the place.

Susan If you try again I'll slap your face.

Sir Robert Susan, now don't be shy!

Susan Fie, Sir Robert, Fie! Sir Robert, Fie! Sir Robert, Fie, Fie, Fie!

(Sir Robert chases her, but she eludes him)

Susan Cordials on the tray;
And Sir Robert, please keep away.

Sir Robert I have only reached the second act.

Susan Well, it's very naughty, that's a fact!

Sir Robert Susan, now pray be still.

Susan I will scream! I will! I will scream! I will! I will scream! That I will!

(Sir Robert succeeds in catching Susan and kissing her. She does not scream. Enter Lady Asymptote)

RECITATIVE (Sir Robert, Susan, Lady Asymptote)

Lady Asymptote Sir Robert! This is singular behaviour!

Sir Robert Madam, I assure you, we were but rehearsing a scene from the play I have written.

Susan *(aside: wiping her mouth gingerly)* So that's what it was!

Lady Asymptote This play will be a success!
It has no want of indelicacy!

Sir Robert Mr. Honeywood values it highly.

Lady Asymptote I shall wait to form my own opinion.

Sir Robert Madam, I intend to give ev'ryone satisfaction.

Lady Asymptote So I perceive! (*To Susan*) Go, wanton!

(*Susan curtseys, and exit*)

Sir Robert Madam: (*he bows low*) I have affairs to attend to.

Lady Asymptote Indeed you have!

(*Exit Sir Robert*)

Lady Asymptote Affairs, i' faith! Shameless rogue!

SONG (Lady Asymptote)

Lady Asymptote If your husband you detect
In a compromising scene,
You know what to expect,
And promptly intervene.
But if you find no clue,
No matter where you go,
It doesn't mean he's true;
It means that you are slow!

Should you find his conduct shameless,
Then give him all the blame,
Yes, give him all the blame;
But still, if it appears he's blameless,
Then blame him all the same!
Yes, blame him, blame him, yes, blame him!
Blame him all the same!

Tho' he'll wear a velvet glove,
And tiptoe 'cross the floor,
In the ardour of his love,
He'll forget to lock the door.
But if you somehow fail
To prove his morals lax,
It doesn't mean no trail –
It simply means no tracks!

Should you find his conduct shameless,
Then give him all the blame!
Yes, give him all the blame!
But still, if it appears he's blameless,
Then blame him all the same!

Yes, blame him, blame him, yes blame him!
Blame him all the same! Blame him! Blame him!

(Enter Knipp)

Knipp Sir Peter Parallel, ma'am.

Lady Asymptote Bid him enter! *(to herself)* Sir Peter Parallel!
A charming man! *(Exit Knipp)*
His punctuality is very fortunate! Tra-la!

(she preens herself. Enter Sir Peter Parallel)

RECIT. AND DUET (Lady Asymptote, Sir Peter Parallel)

(Sir Peter minces and swaggers a little way. He bows, she curtseys. He approaches further, and they bow and curtsey again.)

Lady Asymptote You are come to our play-acting, Sir Peter?

Sir Peter Madam, I am!

Lady Asymptote And for the company of a demure and pretty lady?

Sir Peter *(bowing)* You are too modest, madam!

Lady Asymptote *(aside)* Here's a gallant indeed! *(aloud)* Faith, sir! After the wanton ladies of the court, our simple virtues tempt you to flattery!

Sir Peter Few men are tempted by virtue, madam; and flattery may be sincere!

Lady Asymptote You will find Sarah looking well to-night; and no doubt Sir Robert will expect you to ask for her hand!

Sir Peter *(archly)* My preference lies elsewhere!

Lady Asymptote Fie, Sir Peter! *(he bows, she curtseys)*

Sir Peter I am in a false position, madam, and I hope you will favour my escape from it.

(He bows, and takes her proffered hand)

(aside) Sir Robert wishes to unite me to Sarah, so that her estate may pay off my debt to him. But if I can prevail on this good lady here, to sway her husband's feelings, I may avoid an alliance I do not wish to make, and the discharge of a debt I am in no hurry to pay: *(aloud)* Pray, madam, do not take me for a rake!

Lady Asymptote I take you, Sir, but for a gallant! I'm sure you'd play the cupid,
sir, with any lady who showed willing!

Sir Peter 'Tis precarious business, a gallant's, ma'am: nothing but kiss and
run!

DUET (Sir Peter, Lady Asymptote)

Sir Peter The gallant will call at his lady's chambers,
Nicely perfumed and dressed.

Lady Asymptote If he's discreet and well rehearsed,
He'll sing of her grace and her virtue first,

Sir Peter Although for morals, she's quite the worst

Lady Asymptote While for wantonness he is the best!

Sir Peter The gallant will call at his lady's chambers,
And notice a place to hide!

Lady Asymptote Then they'll exchange an amorous glance,

Sir Peter And think that it's safe to take a chance,

Lady Asymptote But just as he makes the first advance,

Both Her husband is heard outside!

There's nothing so gay! (Sir Peter) So dull:

Both Nothing so gay! (so dull!)

Nothing so gay! (so dull!) Beneath the sun,
As the game of kiss and run!

No wonder then – (Sir Peter) 'Tis odd!

Both No wonder then – ('Tis odd)

No wonder then – ('Tis odd) playwrights think it fun;
There's nothing so gay! (so dull!) Beneath the sun!

(A voice is heard off-stage)

Lady Asymptote Lud, sir – 'tis Sir Robert! He must not find us alone – his
suspicion knows no bounds!

Sir Peter *(surprised)* Shall we be compromised?

Lady Asymptote Ay, I fear so! You must hide! Quick, behind the screen!

(Sir Peter hides behind the screen)

Lady Asymptote I will contrive your escape in a minute: have patience!

That doesn't prevent you having connubial bliss!
Loving him doesn't count, the money is paramount!
And tho' he once had the pox, it left no trace!
So do what you can to-night! Each compliment requite –
Sir Peter is the man you've got to chase!

(Sir Peter, from behind the screen, has taken Lady Asymptote's wrap from her shoulders)

Sir Robert Madam, you have lost your wrap.

Lady Asymptote No, sir, I have but laid it aside.

(Sir Peter throws the wrap over the screen, just in time. Sir Robert turns and sees it)

Sir Robert Ah, there it is! Now Sarah, you must play your part!

Sarah Sir, let me say pooh to you!

(The above three stanzas are now repeated, all three being sung together, with Sir Peter, from behind the screen, making Sir Robert's interpolations in the first)

(Enter Knipp)

Knipp Mr. Honeywood is coming up, sir. *(Knipp remains to serve drinks)*

Sir Robert Ah, Mr. Honeywood at last! Now we shall have our play!

Lady Asymptote *(whispered to Sir Peter)* Have patience – bide your time!

(Mr. Honeywood enters, an imposing figure, and he gradually divests himself of several theatrical costumes and adjuncts. He hands them to Knipp, who eventually puts them all down together. He takes off, in turn, a tall witch's hat and a black cloak, a turban and a Kimono, a red head-scarf, earrings, and a belt stuffed with pistols, a false beard, and finally a false nose. He now stands revealed as himself, and Sarah is evidently impressed. He bows deep. Knipp puts down the costumes, fills glasses with ale and hands them round on a tray.)

Mr Honeywood Good-day, Sir.

Sir Robert Good-day, sir.

Mr Honeywood And a greeting, ladies.

Lady Asymptote Mr. Honeywood, you would be more welcome if you did not encourage my husband's predilection for theatricals. He has time for nothing else.

Mr Honeywood Fie, ma'am, an actor's is an exacting profession. It requires an outlay not only of versatility, but of resources!

SONG (Mr Honeywood)

Mr Honeywood If you're anxious for gains but are lacking in brains,
The Army will answer your search;
While if you've a flair for subsisting on prayer,
You will naturally enter the Church.
But a man whose intellect's high,
(Albeit modest and shy)
Will wish, I venture to say,
To act! To act a part in a play!

(On the word "act", Mr Honeywood strikes a pose)

Sir Robert What play was that, sir?

Mr Honeywood The Siege of Rhodes!

Sir Robert Ha! Very good, sir!

Mr Honeywood If your courage is strong, but your politics wrong,
Then the Navy holds treasures in store;
While men with an eye for a well-contrived lie
Will turn it, of course, on the Law.
But a man whose nature is sweet,
(And perfectly free from conceit)
Will wish, I venture to say,
To act! – To act a part in a play!

Sir Robert What play was that, sir?

Mr Honeywood The Fairy Queen!

Sir Robert Even better, sir!

Mr Honeywood An actor will pour out his heart for you,
Or shout at you till you're afraid;
An actor will play any part for you,
Provided, of course, he gets paid...
If you find, when you add, you have more than you had,
Then Accountancy beckons you on;
While if you've a quirk for avoiding all work,
Your career should be that of a don.
But a man of grit and resource,
(Tho' rather retiring, of course)
Will wish, I venture to say,
To act! – To act a part in a play!

Sir Robert What play was that, sir?

Mr Honeywood Let me finish, sir! A man may have the itch! –

To act a part in a play!
Sir Peter *(concealed: to Lady Asymptote)* How do I get away?
Sir Robert What was that?
Lady Asymptote I said, “let us start with the play”!
Sir Robert Very well!

THE PLAY (Sir Robert, Lady Asymptote, Sarah, Sir Peter, Mr. Honeywood)

(Sir Robert signals to Knipp to issue copies of the play. Everyone disposes of their glass of liquor. Mr Honeywood receives the first copy, which he peruses)

Sir Robert ’Tis called, “The Tragedy of Sir Thomas Overbury”. I am the King (James the First). You, sir *(to Mr Honeywood)*, are Overbury.

Mr Honeywood But sir, I am poisoned after only two pages!

Sir Robert Ay, sir, but ’tis a very painful death, full of expression!

Sir Peter *(from behind screen)* I can think of an expression!

(Sir Robert turns his head suddenly)

Lady Asymptote It will make a fine impression!

Sir Robert *(to Sarah)* You, ma’am, are the Countess of Essex. Sir Peter, when he arrives, will be the Earl of Essex. You are both in love.

Sarah With whom am I in love, Sir?

Sir Robert With the Earl, madam! ’Tis a respectable play!

Sir Peter *(Behind screen)* And a dull one, I’ll warrant!

Lady Asymptote Er – it would else be abhorrent! Who am I, sir?

Sir Robert You are the Queen.

Mr Honeywood Is this verse, or prose, sir?

Sir Robert Call it what you will, I don’t know.

Mr Honeywood What is the scene, sir?

Sir Robert The scene is the Royal Palace. You are summoned to my private presence. Knipp! Did you fetch that cornett from Sir Timothy Tight, as I bade you?

Knipp Yes, sir. Here it is.

Sir Robert Oons! The fool has given you a fipple flute! Well, well. Sound a fanfare! Let the play begin!

(Knipp plays on the recorder)

(Exit Knipp)

(The characters read out their parts in the play, without the least show of enthusiasm)

Mr Honeywood Your majesty, I beg you hear my suit.
These charges of my baseness are unfounded.

Sir Robert I fear my Lady Essex and the Queen
Clamour to see you tortured unto death.
Flee from the court, I bid you, while 'tis safe!

Mr Honeywood I'll to the country, 'til this foul scourge be passed.

Lady Asymptote *(to Sir Robert, who looks daggers at her)* Am I the foul scourge, sir?

Mr Honeywood Here, sir, it says "exit". Where do I go?

Sir Robert Go behind that screen.

Lady Asymptote *(as Mr. Honeywood goes behind the screen)*. Screen! Oh, my gout!

Sir Robert Quiet, ma'am, this is not your scene.

Lady Asymptote *(aside)* 'Twas nearly so: *(relieved)* Ho, ho, ho, ho!

(There is a laugh from Mr Honeywood, behind the screen)

Sir Robert Be still behind that screen, Mr. Honeywood! Enter the
Countess of Essex, two days later.

Sarah I hope that Overbury's doom is nigh!

Sir Robert He left these chambers but a short while since.

Sarah He is in Worcester, hiding in disgrace.

Mr Honeywood But I am in London, sir!

Sir Robert How, sir?

Mr Honeywood This screen is the palace.

Sir Robert Then it must be moved – to Worcester!

(Both Lady Asymptote and Sir Robert make to move the screen, but Sir Robert has put down his script and has both hands free)

Lady Asymptote *(pointing to a spot convenient)* Let it be here!

Sir Robert Let it be here!

(Sir Robert moves it in the direction opposite to that indicated by Lady Asymptote, and returns to his script)

Sir Robert *(to Sarah)* Continue, ma'am!

Sarah What will you do to rid us of this rogue?

Sir Robert He will be tried, and meanwhile, take your ease.

Sarah It says “exit to Audley End”. Where is that?

Sir Robert It is your seat in Essex. Go behind the screen.

Sarah But that is in Worcester!

Sir Robert Then move it here first!

Lady Asymptote *(as Sarah, assisted by Mr Honeywood, moves screen)* Ah! Ah!

Sir Robert What’s this?

Lady Asymptote Ah! My heart!

Sir Robert Madam, a plague on you!

(she falls into his arms, to create a diversion. Sir Peter slips out from behind the screen and thro’ the door as Sarah passes behind the screen from the other side)

Lady Asymptote Sir, ’tis my heart!

Sir Robert *(unsympathetic)* ’Tis very painful, to judge by your caterwauls!

(Enter Sir Peter, as Lady Asymptote lies in Sir Robert’s arms)

Sir Peter How now, domestic bliss?

Sir Robert Ah, Sir Peter at last!

(Sir Peter bows low. Sir Robert bows slightly, and hands a script to Sir Peter)

Sir Robert We are but play-acting. You are the Earl of Essex. There it is
(pointing the place). Enter now!

Sir Peter My liege, they find me guilty of this murder.

Sir Robert So be it, then: the punishment await
Within the Tower of London. Now. farewell!

Lady Asymptote Farewell, my lord. Farewell!

Sir Peter And so, farewell!

(Sir Peter retreats bowing. There is a burst of laughter and sounds of a tussle behind the screen. The screen falls over on to Sir Peter, and Sarah and Mr. Honeywood are discovered kissing)

Sir Robert What’s this, sir!

Lady Asymptote Sarah, explain yourself!

(Sir Peter picks up screen and sets it aside, and Sarah and Mr. Honeywood extricate themselves from each other)

Sir Robert Upon my soul!

Mr Honeywood It means, sir, just this: we have fallen in love –

Sarah We’ve fallen in love, and shall be wed!

Mr Honeywood As soon as we can, with your permission, sir!

Sir Robert I will not hear of it!

QUINTET (Lady Asymptote, Sarah, Sir Peter, Sir Robert, Mr Honeywood)

Lady Asymptote If they're both in love, they should marry straight away!

Sir Peter What a relief! Now there's nothing more to say!

Sir Robert Nothing to say, indeed! There's much that I'll say yet-
What sort of love is this, pray? why, you've only just this moment met!

Lady Asymptote Why, sir, will you not let them be wed?

Sir Robert Because, ma'am, I will not! Such a quick courtship is not proper!

(The following lines are now sung together)

Lady Asymptote If they're both in love, they should marry straight away!
That's the way, then there's nothing more to say!

Sarah Soon we shall be wed – give your blessing and be done!
Love has come at last, and soon we shall be married!

Sir Peter That would be a great relief!

Sir Robert Pray what kind of love is this one? They have just this moment met!
Such a quick courtship is not proper!

Mr Honeywood Soon we shall be wed – give your blessing, pray you,
condescend!
Love has come, sweet love! Soon we shall be married!

(A few bars before the end of this ensemble, Susan has entered. They turn and see her)

Susan Your pardon, madam: may I leave my work now?

Lady Asymptote What's this? Where are you going?

Susan To meet someone, madam.

Lady Asymptote Whom, pray?

Susan I'm not sure, madam.

Lady Asymptote Not sure?

Susan Well, I know, but if I tell you, madam, you'll be very angry.

Lady Asymptote Not as angry as I'll be if you do not tell me. Who is it?

Susan The master!

Lady Asymptote (*shocked*) Sir Robert!

Sir Robert Nonsense!

Susan Sir, you wrote me that letter!

All, save Susan Letter!

Sir Robert No, I wrote no letter!

Lady Silence, sir, her tale rings true. (*to Susan*) Show me this letter!

Susan Madam, I have lost it, but the writing was Sir Robert's.

Sir Robert It was not.

Lady Asymptote (*to Sir Robert*) Sir! (*to Susan*) What did it say?

Susan "Meet me outside the Haymarket Playhouse"; and signed "Your own true love"!

Sir Robert (*to Susan*) Hussy!

Lady Asymptote (*to Sir Robert*) Deceiver!

Sir Robert (*to Lady Asymptote*) Madam, I protest, I am innocent. 'Tis but a story – the girl never had this letter!

Susan Oh, yes sir, I did, and advances to go with it!

Lady Asymptote So I saw!

Sarah I, too, have an assignment outside the Haymarket Playhouse, with this same "true love"! (*she shows letter*) Here it is!

Lady Asymptote (*to Sir Robert, outraged*) Your ward as well, sir!

Sir Robert (*taking the letter*) Madam!

Lady Asymptote Let's see the monster's writing!

Sir Robert 'Tis not my hand.

Lady Asymptote (*taking the letter from him*) You have but disguised it! I am not so easily duped!

Sir Robert I did not write it – unless I wrote it in my sleep.

Lady Asymptote You could write anything in your sleep: even your confounded play.

Sarah Sir! You are a hypocrite, and a humbug! All this pretence of propriety! You have no grounds to deny me a marriage!

Sir Robert I have, madam: and I shall!

SEXTET (Lady Asymptote, Susan, Sarah, Sir Peter, Sir Robert, Mr. Honeywood)

(The following lines are sung together)

Lady Asymptote If they are both in love, they should marry straight away,
That's the way, then there's nothing more to say.
It's best if they are married right soon!

Susan Faithless lover, leads me up the garden path;
Then denies he ever sent the note – faithless man!
I'll be even with him yet!

Sarah Pooh, sir, soon we shall be wed!
Give your blessing, give it and be done!
Love has come at last, and soon we shall be married!

Sir Peter That would be a great relief!

Sir Robert Pray, what kind of love is this one?
They have just this moment met:
Such a short courtship is not proper!

(Enter Knipp)

Knipp If you please, sir, may I go out?

Sir Robert Be off, boy!

Sir Peter Stay – where are you going?

Knipp To meet someone, sir.

Sir Peter Whom, pray?

Knipp Susan!

Susan *(holding up letter)* Knipp! Is this your letter?

Knipp Yes, that's it!

All, save Knipp So that's it! That's it!

Susan Knipp, you're a naughty boy!

Lady Asymptote *(to Sir Robert)* Quite a narrow escape, sir!

Sir Robert *(to Knipp)* Young man, you have put me in a predicament, with
your anonymous note!

Knipp *(still smiling)* Yes, sir!

Sir Robert In your future transactions, kindly leave your mark, as I now
leave mine!

Knipp Oh, sir!

(Sir Robert seizes Knipp, and bends him across his knee, and proceeds to spank him rhythmically. Meanwhile, Sarah, Mr Honeywood, Lady Asymptote and Sir Peter have a quick whispered confabulation, and agree on some plan of action)

Sir Robert You, sir, are Knipp, and not “my own true love”!

Lady Asymptote Beat the boy no more, sir, lest he acquire a taste for it!

Knipp *(getting up from Sir Robert’s knee)* I have, madam!

(Mr. Honeywood whispers in Sir Robert’s ear)

Sir Robert My play? A guarantee, from Sarah?

(Mr. Honeywood moves away. Sir Robert looks pleased, but only for a moment. Sir Peter whispers into his other ear)

Sir Robert Your uncle, the privy councillor? A place? Solvent? Your debt? Five per cent, sir – why, that’s good news! Still, I’m not so soon persuaded!

(Lady Asymptote whispers in his ear. Sir Robert gets up)

Sir Robert Madam, I suspect you are right! Honeywood, I withdraw my objection.

Mr Honeywood Your humble servant, sir.

(they all bow or curtsy)

Sarah *(to Lady Asymptote)* what did you say to him, madam?

Lady Asymptote I reminded him that we had no courtship, I said: *(to Sarah’s “If love should come” tune)* – When he and I were married, we knew no love, just pitchforked together; our first encounter was in the church, when both our families had made their settlements, dowry’d been paid – ’twas just a bargain. But times will change. That’s what I said to him.

ENSEMBLE

All Good advice will suffice, tho’ stupidity
Often denies the fact, reason knows no defeat.
Reason may counter the complicated plans of men;
Timely persuasion may start to publish banns again.

Sarah,) But love would never score in the war with cupidity

Mr. Honeywood,) Did not a cupid’s dart put the foe in retreat.

Sir Robert,) Debt and ambition would with love have done away;

Sir Peter) But it is plain that sweet persuasion’s won the day!

All Happily now instead, they'll be wed with rapidity –
 There is a final thought; their acquaintance has been so short,
 May their love be as sweet!

Sir Robert *(still a bit disgruntled)* But 'tis an affair of exceeding quick
 flowering!

Sir Peter May it bear the sweetest fruit!

Sir Robert So be it!

Mr Honeywood Sirs, ladies, come: I bid you all to my playhouse; the one in the
 Haymarket.

Lady Asymptote 'Tis well, then, let's end our playing with play.
*(Lady Asymptote nods to Knipp and Susan, who go out and re-enter presently with hats
 and sticks for the gentlemen and cloaks for the ladies, which they duly give to them)*

FINALE

Mr. Honeywood When talking's been done and love has been won,
 And all is forgiven once more;
 Don't pause in your tracks, but away! And relax
 To the shouts of encore and encore.
 So all you men of affairs
 Abandon your troubles and cares,
 Go off without delay,
 And take! – And take your seat at a play:
(Knipp offers a pile of discarded effects to Mr. Honeywood, who accepts them)

All But love would never score, in the war with cupidity,
 Did not a cupid's dart put the foe in retreat!
 Debt and ambition would with love have done away,
 But it is plain that sweet persuasion's won the day;
 Happily now instead, they'll be wed with rapidity -
 There is a final thought: their acquaintance has been so short,
 May their love be as sweet!

 For love must come, one day, then it must endure,
 No power can destroy love!
 Three times a letter, but four is something better:
 Pray it be so, that love enjoy love!

*(Exeunt all, save Susan and Knipp. Susan hits Knipp on the head with the letter, and puts
 the letter back in the rose-bowl)*

(Exit Susan)

Knipp

(spoken) I told you so! (During pause in the music)

(Exit Knipp)

CURTAIN