

Georgiana's Steward

A Jacobean Tragedy in Three Acts

for Georgiana Mustata

by [Paul Martin Freeman](#) (October 2023)



The Surprise, Jean-Antoine Watteau, 1718

Cast of Characters:

Georgiana, a countess

Her steward

A lord

The Scene: Sicily

Act One: The Lovers

A fair young countess once was there
Who lived in antique Sicily;
And she possessed a steward rare
Who loved his mistress secretly.

This countess was Georgiana named:
A lady haughty, proud and strong.
And he with passion unashamed
Adored her whether right or wrong.

Georgiana, in despite of rank,
Conceal it though she might, was poor;
And as in poverty she sank,
Would sell the gorgeous robes she wore.

Her jewelry, too, that also went
As did her other finery.
But still the gold she gained she spent
And further sank in poverty.

This proud Georgiana never yearned
For love of man of any kind;
And all who sought her hand she spurned
With much derision most unkind.

But though for love she had no thought
For gold she longed most greedily.
With gold could finery be bought
To live again in luxury!

And so she plotted late at night
To wage for gold a bold campaign.
Her beauty would she use to fight

And with her charms her goal attain.

Some leagues away, of foul repute,
There lived a lord upon a hill,
And he, being rich and dissolute,
She thought would help her coffers fill.

She planned, in brief, by craft and stealth
To rob this lord of all his gold.
And thus would she acquire wealth
And live in luxury untold.

This plan required her steward's aid,
And only he could make it work.
He bore, she knew, a trusty blade,
And never would his duty shirk.

But when she first explained her plan,
Expecting blind obedience,
He answered bold as any man,
With proud defiant indifference.

"Dear lady," says he, bowing low,
"I've served you well full many a year,"
"And those who've felt my anger know"
"Such things for me contain no fear."

"But honour bids me turn you down,"
"For robber will I never be."
"And I would rather burn or drown"
"Than ever such a thing agree."

At this Georgiana reels in shock
To be so haughtily refused;
That he whom she has thought her rock
Should have her brazenly abused.

She tries to coax; explains her plight,
But all, it seems, to no avail.

Her steward's mind is bolted tight
And all such means are doomed to fail.

At last, distressed, she begs his aid;
She offers all that he desires
If only he with trusty blade
Will do the deed that she requires.

The steward listens, deep in thought,
And contemplates her heartfelt plea.
By gold his honour can't be bought,
And yet there's more, as now we'll see.

"Sweet lady," says he, standing square,
"Though honour most of all I prize,"
"For honour have I little care"
"Compared to two such lovely eyes."

"Allow me but a night of love"
"And I will do the thing you ask."
"I swear by God in Heaven above"
"This deed shall be my sacred task!"

Georgiana stares at him aghast
To have her words so understood.
For by her honour, now he's cast
Aspersions on her maidenhood!

She stamps her foot; she calls him dog
That he should thus insult her so.
By God, she'll have him whipped and flogged!
Extremest tortures shall he know!

The steward looks at her and smiles.
"Your tortures," says he, "hold no fear."
"For I would face a thousand trials"
"To spare you but a single tear."

"And I would welcome such a death,"

“Embrace it, too, right heartily,”
“And swear then with my final breath”
“To serve you all eternity.”

“And this I’d do for love of you,”
“For Love requires we pay the fee.”
“But if to Love we’re ever true,”
“From churlish Death we’re ever free.”

She looks at him afresh, surprised:
Here’s something new, not felt before.
This man, so hitherto unprized,
Has somehow touched her very core!

Without a word she turns on heel,
Yet gives him first a searching look.
Some strange desire she starts to feel,
Not such as found in any book.

That night she trembles going to bed;
She gazes at the evening star.
She thinks about what’s now ahead,
And carefully leaves her door ajar.

Act Two: The Plan

And now the two are lovers sworn;
They’ve tasted of transcendent bliss.
From their delight such love is born,
And never was such love as this.

And when they’re one in panting flesh
Their very souls it seems entwine.
They stop for breath, then start afresh,
With nothing left of yours and mine.

But here the sun begins its work:
With golden shafts it probes the room.

It searches out where shadows lurk,
Dispelling all the morning gloom.

The lovers wake and greet the day
That welcomes them with summer's charms.
To work he, also, must away,
Not linger in Georgiana's arms.

Georgiana, too, has work to do,
For she has many household cares,
With visitors attending to
And tending to estate affairs.

But come the night they'll come again
And to their private world return.
Till then it is the world of men
To which the lovers need to turn.

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And so these lovers pass their days,
Impatient for the fall of night.
Their world a strange regime obeys
Where light is dark and dark is light.

Yet always deep inside they hide
The plot agreed and planned.
But now, for love their time they bide,
Though soon they'll find their time at hand.

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One morning there arrives some news:
The lord is shortly bound for Rome.
There is, they see, no time to lose
If they're to find him there at home.

That night the pair decide to act:
They'll do the deed; the die is cast.
With passion then they seal their pact:

For second thoughts the time is passed.

The day begins as usual though
With duties which they must perform.
And nothing happens now to show
Or warn about the coming storm.

That evening she requests her coach:
Her steward though will drive tonight.
They manage thus the time's approach,
Departing in the dwindling light.

The journey to the lord's abode
Requires they travel several hours.
He carefully guards his precious load
With all his skills and all his powers.

Arriving there he pulls the bell,
Requesting shelter for the night.
The customs of the land compel
That none ignore the traveller's plight.

The lord is called; he looks with scorn:
He's sworn, he sneers, a sacred vow
That he no rogue ignobly born
Will ever in his house allow!

The steward bows and then explains:
It's not for him he makes this plea.
He serves a lady who complains
Of much discomfort, as he'll see.

She cannot travel more this night,
And thus entreats his lordship so.
If he would but assist her plight,
Tomorrow early shall she go.

"A lady?" says this wicked lord.
His eyebrows arch; he looks with glee.

The steward's hand's upon his sword:
He's thinking how to help her flee!

Too late! The lord is striding out
To where his sweet Georgiana waits;
Too late the steward starts to shout!
And thus are sealed their several fates.

The lord's retainers swarm him now
As proud Georgiana's forced inside.
His entrance there they won't allow,
And by this ploy the pair divide.

The heavy doors are bolted tight:
Georgiana's helpless, trapped within!
The steward bangs with all his might—
There's everywhere an awful din!

The bolts are loosened; men emerge—
Too many ruffians to withstand!
And on the steward the curs converge:
They seize his sword and slice his hand!

At last, the doors are opened wide;
Georgiana's thrown upon the ground!
Her honour's gone and so's her pride—
Such things do even beasts confound!

The doors are shut; they hear the lock.
The lovers now are on their own.
He leads Georgiana, numb with shock;
In silence then they journey home.

Act Three: The Revenge

The weeks and months that follow pass
As though in some appalling dream.
Their plan to rob had turned to farce

Which nothing ever could redeem.

The outrage she had suffered though
Made all as naught their other woes.
This was no light or passing blow,
But wound that seemed would never close.

He tries consoling her with love,
But sees she wants to be alone.
She sleeps; he watches from above—
Such pain as this he's never known!

But Time can heal most any wound
And with Georgiana does its best.
In tender, loving care cocooned,
Her grief she slowly lays to rest.

And by the time cold winter comes,
Full half a year since those events,
Not much remains that still benumbs,
Or proud Georgiana's heart that rents.

One morning when the lovers wake,
Though nothing's said, there's been a change.
With pride and honour still at stake,
A matter now they must arrange.

The lord, they know, returned from Rome,
Goes riding everyday at dawn.
He mounts a chestnut roan alone,
Of rogue and ruffian escort shorn.

That night they ponder what they've planned,
This time determined not to fail.
Her heart has healed—but so's his hand,
And honour means they must prevail.

They choose the day and make prepare;
She orders once again her coach.

They travel through the frosty air,
His care for her beyond reproach.

They journey down familiar ways,
And all is deathly quiet, forlorn.
She seems absorbed, with pensive gaze;
They reach the place as planned at dawn.

He blocks the track and stops the coach;
Then looks about: they're quite alone.
He sees from far the lord's approach:
He's riding on his chestnut roan.

The lord espies the coach askew,
Discerning, too, a woman's arm.
"What's this," he snarls, "some wench to screw?"
"A peek at 'er can't do no 'arm!"

The lord dismounts—he pivots fast:
The steward with sword is standing there!
The struggle's brief; the lord's outclassed
And dies in proud Georgiana's glare!

Finis

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Paul Martin Freeman is an art dealer in London. The poem is from *The Bus Poems: Tales Sacred and Profane*, currently in preparation. His book, *A Chocolate Box Menagerie*, is published by New English Review Press and is available [here](#).

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