

The Grand Duke
or, The Statutory Duel
A Comic Opera, in Two Acts

Synopsis by Fredric Woodbridge Wilson

Produced at the Savoy Theatre, London, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on Saturday, March 7, 1896, for 123 performances through July 10, 1896. Sullivan conducted the first performance.

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| RUDOLPH, Grand Duke of Pfennig-Halbpfennig | <i>Light Baritone</i> | Walter Passmore |
| ERNEST DUMMKOPF, a Theatrical Manager | <i>Tenor</i> | Charles Kenningham |
| LUDWIG, his Leading Comedian | <i>Baritone</i> | Rutland Barrington |
| DR. TANNHÄUSER, a Notary | <i>Tenor</i> | H. Scott Russell |
| THE PRINCE OF MONTE CARLO | <i>Bass-Baritone</i> | R. Scott Fishe |
| VISCOUNT MENTONE | <i>Chorus</i> | E. Carleton |
| BEN HASHBAZ, a Costumier | <i>Baritone</i> | C. Herbert Workman |
| THE HERALD | <i>Baritone</i> | Jones Hewson |
| THE PRINCESS OF MONTE CARLO, betrothed to Rudolph | <i>Soprano</i> | Emmie Owen |
| THE BARONESS VON KRAKENFELDT (CAROLINE), betrothed to Rudolph | <i>Contralto</i> | Rosina Brandram |
| JULIA JELICOE, an English Comedian | <i>Soprano</i> | Ilka von Palmay |
| LISA, a Soubrette | <i>Soprano</i> | Florence Perry |
| Members of Ernest Dummkopf's Theatrical Company | | |
| OLGA | <i>Mezzo-Soprano</i> | Mildred Baker |
| GRETCHEN | <i>Soprano</i> | Ruth Vincent |
| BERTHA | <i>Mezzo-Soprano</i> | Jessie Rose |
| ELSA | <i>Chorus</i> | Ethel Wilson |
| MARTHA | <i>Chorus</i> | Beatrice Perry |

CHAMBERLAINS, NOBLES, ACTORS, ACTRESSES, etc.

The opera was not produced in America, nor was it revived in London during D'Oyly Carte's original management.

ACT I — THE PUBLIC SQUARE OF SPEISESAAL, 1750

The first act opens as the members of Ernest Dummkopf's theatrical company enjoy a

wedding breakfast in honor of Ludwig and Lisa (Chorus, *Won't it be a pretty wedding?*). The actors find fault with every aspect of the occasion, but “Still it is a pretty wedding!” They greet the entrance of the happy couple (Chorus, *Here they come, the couple plighted*), “Till divorce or death shall part them.” The newlyweds exchange compliments. Dr. Tannhäuser, the Notary, enters and addresses them; he is disappointed that the feast has begun without him. He is the “solicitor to the conspiracy to dethrone the Grand Duke,” to which the entire company are party. He learns that the wedding has not yet taken place because the despotic Grand Duke has engaged all of the parsons to settle his own engagement with the wealthy Baroness von Krakenfeldt. Olga declares that the Grand Duke is to be dethroned on the next day, but Ludwig silences her because it is forbidden to allude to their conspiracy without first exchanging the secret sign, “You must eat a sausage-roll!” (Song, *By the mystic regulation*). They do, as their “offended gorges rise!”

Members of the troupe are confident that their manager, Ernest Dummkopf, will be elected to succeed the Grand Duke, especially as they themselves have been assured of places about the Court. Dummkopf enters and gives them the welcome news that his election seems assured, as the other candidates seem to have been disqualified through arrest or infancy. He assures his employees and supporters that they shall all receive honors, unlimited credit, and regularly paid salaries. As for his own qualifications to rule a Grand Duchy, he exclaims “for ten years past I’ve ruled a theatrical company! A man who can do that can rule anything!” (Song, *Were I a king in very truth*). His prospects are happy — except that his beloved Julia Jellicoe, a celebrated English *comédienne*, “treats my respectful advance with disdain unutterable!”

Julia enters and, with haughty contempt, confronts Dummkopf with a dilemma: her contract requires that she shall play the leading parts in his productions; but in the present *coup* that rôle would be the part of the Grand Duchess — that is, the wife of the detested Dummkopf himself. But “business is business”: Julia assures Dummkopf that “throughout my career I have made it a rule never to allow private feeling to interfere with my professional duties,” and she muses over the delicacy of the situation (Ballad, *How would I play this part*).

The company enter, greatly agitated (Chorus, *My goodness me! what shall we do?*). Ludwig reveals (Song, *Ten minutes since I met a chap*) that he has inadvertently betrayed the conspiracy to a stranger who must have been the Grand Duke’s detective. Ludwig is denounced for his carelessness (Chorus, *You booby dense*).

The Notary offers a way out of the present difficulty. In Pfennig-Halbpfennig there is a law establishing the notion of a Statutory Duel (Song, *About a century since*): instead of dueling, the adversaries draw cards, and the one who draws the lower card is declared legally dead. The winner is obliged to settle all the loser’s debts and adopt his relations. But all laws in Pfennig-Halbpfennig are automatically expunged after a century, and this law was enacted a century ago that very day. The Notary’s plan is for Ludwig and Ernest to fight a

Statutory Duel, whereupon the winner is to denounce the loser to the Grand Duke. As the man is legally dead, he is beyond punishment; tomorrow, when the law expires, he may come to life with impunity.

They agree that the plan offers obvious advantages over the traditional practice of dueling (Quintet, *Strange the views some people hold!*). The two adversaries draw their cards: Ernest draws a King, and Ludwig draws an Ace. Thereupon, Ernest is regarded as being legally defunct. The Notary offers to serve as trustee, for the time being, of Lisa and Julia. The members of the company dance and exit rejoicing.

The seven Chamberlains of the Grand Duke march on (Chorus, *The good Grand Duke of Pfennig Halbpfennig*). They hail the Grand Duke — officially — though in private they, too, despise him. The decrepit old Grand Duke appears, dressed in miserable patched clothes to which are attached a profusion of orders and decorations (Song, *A pattern to professors of monarchical autonomy*). As he consults the Lord Chamberlain on the subject of his wedding to the Baroness von Krakenfeldt, it becomes clear that he is thoroughly corrupt: his principles are private economy and public liberality. The Baroness von Krakenfeldt enters, and she delivers to the Grand Duke a letter containing the report of his detective. But she had wrapped the letter in a newspaper, in which she notices a biography of the Grand Duke which mentions that he was betrothed in infancy to the Princess of Monte Carlo. He admits this fact, but he contends that the engagement is “practically off”: the betrothal is void unless the marriage is held before the Princess comes of age, which, coincidentally, is to occur on the following day at two o’clock. The Prince of Monte Carlo is “stony-broke,” and cannot afford to bring his daughter to be married; consequently, at that hour the Grand Duke will be free of his obligation, and has appointed that time for his wedding to the Baroness. They sing of the bliss of economical wedlock (Duet, *As o’er our penny roll we sing*).

The Baroness exits, and the Grand Duke reads his detective’s report. When he discovers the plot he is greatly agitated (Song, *When you find you’re a broken-down critter*). Ludwig approaches the Grand Duke, intending to make a confession according to the conspirators’ plan. But before he can come to the point, the Grand Duke declares that he is miserable to the point of considering suicide, “if I could only hit upon some cheap and painless method” of putting an end to an unsupportable existence. Ludwig seizes the opportunity, and cunningly suggests the Statutory Duel as the Grand Duke’s solution. They will concoct a quarrel, the duel will be rigged, Dummkopf offers himself as the unfortunate winner who will take the brunt of the conspiracy, and the next day the Grand Duke may come to life.

They summon the people (Finale, *Come hither, all you people*) who believe that they are being called to answer for their complicity in the conspiracy (Chorus, *With faltering feet*). The two “adversaries” begin their altercation (Duet, *Big bombs, small bombs, great guns and little ones!*). The cards are drawn — again a King and an Ace — and the Grand Duke duly loses. He exits, amid general ridicule. Ludwig gives some idea of his policies as the new

Grand Duke (Song, *Oh, a Monarch who boasts intellectual graces*), which include appointing all of his own associates to high position. Julia Jellicoe interrupts (Song, *Ah, pity me, my comrades true*), pointing out that according to her contract, she ought to play the part of the Grand Duchess. Lisa is appalled by Julia's claim to her fianc,'s hand (Duet, *Oh, listen to me, dear*), but the Notary declares that "Though marriage contracts — or whate'er you call 'em — are very solemn, Dramatic contracts (which you all adore so) Are even more so!" The disconsolate Lisa accepts the decision (Song, *The die is cast*), and exits. Julia admonishes the company that the show must go on, and the act concludes with general rejoicing as Ludwig is carried round the stage and all prepare for their new r"les.

ACT II — THE HALL IN THE GRAND DUCAL PALACE, THE NEXT MORNING

The members of the theatrical company, now dressed in the pastoral costumes of *Troilus and Cressida*, herald the return of Ludwig and Julia from their marriage ceremony (Chorus, *As before you we defile*). Ludwig presents his Grand Duchess, Julia (Recitative, *Your loyalty our Ducal heartstrings touches*), and, rather in the form of a theatrical manager's prospectus, he presents his plan to manage the Grand Duchy along the lines of the sham erudition of the Greeks as represented in the theatre (Song, *At the outset I may mention it's my sovereign intention*).

Lisa pleads with Julia to take care of her beloved Ludwig (Song, *Take care of him — he's much too good to live*). She exits, weeping, and Ludwig and Julia discuss how she is to "make the most of the Grand Duchess." He suggests she might play the part as "tender, gentle, submissive, affectionate (but not too affectionate) child-wife." On the contrary, she insists that her temperament is better suited to scenes of a more dramatic character (Duet, *Now, Julia, come*).

The chorus enter excitedly (Chorus, *Your Highness, there's a party at the door*) to announce the arrival of the Baroness von Krakenfeldt. She is cross at having been kept waiting on her wedding day, and threatens vengeance. Ludwig, addressing the Baroness in the most familiar terms, informs her of the unfortunate sudden demise of the Grand Duke Rudolph. Ludwig presents his Grand Duchess to the Baroness; they take an instant dislike to one another, and exchange incivilities. On learning that Rudolph was the victim of a Statutory Duel, the Baroness is relieved, as the Act expires that day; but Ludwig informs the Baroness that he has seen fit to renewing the law for another century. The Baroness apprises Ludwig of the implication of his action: he is required to assume all of the late Grand Duke's responsibilities, and she is "the most overwhelming of them all!" Julia objects, but Ludwig determines that the Baroness "has the law on her side." The entire company, excepting Julia, dance off to their wedding (Chorus, *Now away to the wedding we go*). She sings despairingly (Song, *Broken every promise plighted*), but she resolves that "No good ever came of repining," and she exits hopefully.

Ernest, still dead according to the statute, enters and sees the wedding procession. He confronts Lisa, but she runs away; likewise, Julia is frightened off at the sight of him. He follows her, and learns that Ernest has revived the law. He begs Julia to run off with him; when she refuses, he asks that she at least be his widow (Duet, *If the light of love's lingering ember*). The wedding procession re-enters (Chorus, *Now bridegroom and bride let us toast*). A distant march is heard, and a Herald announces the arrival of the Grand Duke Rudolph's betrothed and her father (Song, *The Prince of Monte Carlo, From Mediterranean water*). Ludwig has an idea, and instructs the Court to conceal themselves behind the draperies.

The Prince and Princess of Monte Carlo enter, attended by six supernumeraries from the Theatre Monaco and Ben Hashbaz, a costumier (Duet, *We're rigged out in magnificent array*). They have come to Pfennig-Halbpfennig to compel the Grand Duke to honor his marriage contract with the Princess. The Prince has spent all of his winnings at roulette to finance their journey.

At the sound of a gong the curtains fly back and the Court rush wildly on to the stage, dancing wildly. Eventually the visitors are caught up in the reckless dance, and at the end all fall down exhausted. Ludwig greets the visitors saying their reception was of the highest order, but threatens to eject the visitors bodily. The Prince introduces himself, but of course their names mean nothing to Ludwig. They talk at cross purposes, learning of Ludwig's three Grand Duchesses, until he realizes that they believe he is Rudolph. When Ludwig informs them that he has taken over the extinct Grand Duke's obligations, the Princess is happy to count herself among them. She asserts a prior claim over the others, and the chorus dance off (Chorus, *Away to the wedding we'll go*). As they depart, Rudolph, Ernest, and the Notary appear; the others kneel in astonishment.

Ludwig renounces them as non-entities, but Rudolph denies the legality of extending the statute on the grounds that Ludwig is an imposter. The Notary explains that there has been an oversight: in the statute "it is expressly laid down that Ace shall count invariably as lowest!" Just at that moment the statute expires. The opera concludes as the company once again dance off to be married (Finale, *Happy couples, lightly treading*) — Rudolph with the pretty Princess of Monte Carlo, Lisa with Ludwig, Julia Jellicoe with Ernest Dummkopf — leaving the Baroness von Krakenfeldt (presumably) alone.

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