

Scene Seven

FRANZ

It is a brilliant morning in winter. The sun streams into Anatol's sitting room. A new painting hangs on the wall and several of his old ones are gone. The room seems cleaner, lighter, simpler than before. This is not just a change brought about by shifting styles. Something else has occurred. Anatol rushes in from the garden to haunt his bedroom door.

Anatol is dressed in formal trousers and a robe. He is so preoccupied that he doesn't notice that Franz is in the room. Franz goes towards the bedroom.

ANATOL

What are you doing?! When did you sneak in?

FRANZ

THE WEDDING DAY. *(to Anatol)* I believe you called for me?

ANATOL

Yes. Coffee.

FRANZ

Right away, sir.

ANATOL

Shhh! Just move more quietly. That'll be all.

FRANZ

Two cups?

ANATOL

Two cups.

The door bell rings several times.

ANATOL

Who's ringing at this hour?

FRANZ

Shall I answer that, sir?

ANATOL

Answer it, answer it.

Franz leaves. Anatol gently cracks the bedroom door, peeks in and shuts it again.

ANATOL

Getting married is the last thing I feel like doing today.

Max bursts in followed by Franz who carries coffee.

MAX

Anatol!

ANATOL

Shh! One more cup, Franz.

MAX

We already have two.

ANATOL

Franz? Thank you.

Franz goes out.

So what brings you here at eight in the morning?

MAX

It's ten.

ANATOL

So what brings you here at ten in the morning?

MAX

My absent-mindedness.

ANATOL

Shh!

MAX

Nervous?

ANATOL

Very.

MAX

Not today!

ANATOL

Why are you here?

MAX

I'm your best man, remember? And, more to the point, your cousin Alma's escort.

And? ANATOL

MAX
Well, her bouquet. I forgot all about it and I need to order one. So what color is she wearing. (*no response*) Violet? Pink? Blue, green..?

Not green. ANATOL

Not green? MAX

She never wears green. ANATOL

How am I supposed to know that? MAX

Shhh! Calm down! ANATOL

You don't know her color, is that it? MAX

Pink. Or blue. ANATOL

Which? MAX

Who cares? ANATOL

My bouquet cares. MAX

ANATOL
Order both, and wear the one that's wrong on your head.

MAX
If that's intended to be a joke, it's not funny.

ANATOL
Neither is the one I'm making this afternoon.

MAX
Anatol, what's the matter? This is your wedding day.

I'm on edge. ANATOL

What aren't you telling me? MAX

Nothing. ANATOL

(from the bedroom) Anatol! ILONA

Excuse me. ANATOL

He goes into the bedroom. Ilona laughs. Max can't decide to be incredulous or livid, so he settles for appalled. Franz enters with the third cup and leaves again. Anatol comes in, giving Ilona a kiss just before he shuts the door. There is a moment before Max can find adequate expression.

You are unbelievable! MAX

Let me explain. ANATOL

If this is how you behave on your wedding day, what..? MAX

Let me explain. You'll understand. ANATOL

I will not understand. I'm no prude, but this is... MAX

Are you going to listen? ANATOL

(after a moment) Make it quick, I've got a wedding to go to. MAX

You've made your point! *(pause)* Last night my father-in-law-to-be threw me a bachelor's party. ANATOL

MAX

I know. I was there.

ANATOL

So you know! A very lively group, plenty of champagne, everyone drinking to everyone else's health...

MAX

...and to your happiness in marriage.

ANATOL

Yes. Oh, that was you! Thank you.

MAX

You thanked me last night.

ANATOL

I actually enjoyed it, it felt... right, getting married. By the time midnight rolled around I was downright elated about the whole idea.

MAX

After four glasses of champagne.

ANATOL

Six. Sophia's first boyfriend was there, you know.

MAX

Ralmen?

ANATOL

Yes, the poet. The kind of boy who is every girl's first love but no woman's last.

MAX

You were saying?

ANATOL

I didn't mind that he was there, I found it amusing. Until I left. I kissed Sophia as I went out, but she gave me a distinctly chilly response, and by the time I got through the hall and down the steps to the sidewalk, I was shaking all over from cold.

MAX

Uh-oh.

ANATOL

There were some guests gathered in front: Uncle Edward, five sheets to the wind, kept trying to kiss me, and Professor Lipman sang me a bawdy song at the top of his lungs. Ralmen turned up his collar and slinked down the alley. Someone joked that I'd be wise to spend the night beneath Sophia's window. Then they drifted off and left me alone.

MAX
 Uh-oh.

ANATOL
 Alone in the cold, snow swirling around me. It was dreadful.

MAX
 So you took yourself off to...?

ANATOL
 The Masquerade Ball.

MAX
(starting to leave) I know the rest.

ANATOL
 No you don't! There I am, alone in the cold...

MAX
 In grave danger of chapped lips.

ANATOL
 Then it comes to me, this wave of dread. I suddenly see that the carefree days of youth end tonight. It is the last time I can come home late without arousing suspicion. My last chance for adventure, maybe even for love!

MAX
 Oh, Anatol.

ANATOL
 So there I am, surrounded by a whirling mass of revelers; the swish of silk and satin, shining eyes, masks, sweet perfumes on white shoulders, the whole madness of the dance. I plunge into it with all the zeal of my soul. I want to drink it in, bathe in it!

MAX
 It's getting late.

ANATOL
 The crowd sweeps me up. It's as if they're dancing for me alone, for my farewell. Oh, Max, the colors, the impressions, I did, I drank it all in, drank it in...

MAX
 What didn't you drink?

ANATOL
 And it filled up my heart.

MAX
 Or something lower.

ANATOL
Do you remember Katrina?

MAX
Katrina!?

ANATOL
Shhh!

MAX
(*pointing to the bedroom*) Katrina?

ANATOL
No, no... but she was there. And The Brunette, and Blonde Liza, and on and on, and I knew them all in spite of their masks! Except for one. She was so alluring, yet... And we kept meeting, everywhere, at the fountain, the buffet, the lobby. Finally she caught my arm, and I knew.

MAX
An old friend?

ANATOL
Guess!

MAX
I'm...

ANATOL
Her!

MAX
There's such a large selection of possibility.

ANATOL
The one I had to duck when I got engaged.

MAX
The actress? What's her name?

ANATOL
"I'm going away tomorrow. No I don't know when I'll return, but I'll love you always."
That one.

MAX
Ilona?

ANATOL
Shh!

Ilona!
MAX

ANATOL
Please! So, anyway, "You're back" she says. "Oh yes, just tonight." "Why didn't you write?" "No post office." "I've seen no one else." "Nor have I." Then the tray with champagne came by, and well...

MAX
You drank it in.

ANATOL
We hire a cab and drive here, just as we used to, her head on my shoulder. She murmurs how we are never again to part.

He's talked himself into a daze.

MAX
Anatol. Is that it? Anatol?

ANATOL
Never again. (*snapping out of it*) So this afternoon I get married.

MAX
To someone else.

ANATOL
Of course to someone else, we always marry "someone else".

MAX
Don't you think it's time to ask her to...? (leave)

ANATOL
I'll see if she's ready. It's poignant, don't you think?

MAX
Disgraceful is more like it.

ANATOL
Yes, but still poignant.

MAX
Hurry up!

At this Ilona enters. She is elegantly disheveled, her hooded cloak from the evening before serving as a dressing gown.

ILONA
Oh, it's only Max.

MAX

Only Max.

ILONA

I thought you meant some stranger was out here, or I'd have come out long ago. Morning, Max. And what's your opinion of our little weasel?

MAX

Weasel's the word.

ILONA

There I was weeping and wailing over my lost love, and the whole time he was just... Anatol, where'd you go, exactly?

ANATOL

Away.

ILONA

Someplace with no post office. But now I've got you, and I'm not letting go! Kiss me!

ANATOL

Really. Please. I...

ILONA

Max doesn't care. Kiss.

They kiss.

Oh, look at that face. Smile! Look, we'll have coffee and celebrate.

ANATOL

Celebrate.

MAX

My dear, Ilona. I'm afraid I can't.

He tries, and fails, to get the desired response from Anatol.

In fact, I really don't see how Anatol...

ILONA

How Anatol...?

MAX

He really needs to...

ILONA

Needs to...?

MAX

He should be... *(still no response)* He should be dressed by now!

ILONA
That's silly. Why would he dress to stay at home?

ANATOL
Well, you see, I can't, really. Stay home. Today.

ILONA
Sure you can.

She gives him a lingering kiss.
Try.

ANATOL
I have to be somewhere.

ILONA
Tell them you're otherwise engaged.

MAX
That's an unfortunate choice of words.

ANATOL
I have to go to a wedding.

ILONA
So?

ANATOL
So... well... I'm... sort of the best man, in a manner of speaking.

ILONA
And your bridesmaid is mad for you.

MAX
That's not exactly...

ILONA
Well, I am. Mad for you. And this is exactly what...
Another kiss.
...I mean by that.

ANATOL
Yes, my dear, I really have to...

MAX
He really does.

ANATOL
I'll only be gone two hours, then we can...