

Swordsong

David Richmond and Drew Fracher

SCENE 8

(Xfade: The courtyard of an inn, The Lion's Head, appears. The usual suspects are disporting themselves.. musketeers, king's guard, draymen, the landlord's beautiful daughter, in short, the lot.)

At one table sit D'Albert and some cronys, on leave from some border maneuver of little import.)

D'ALBERT

Now I don't mind fighting Germans, but I hate the idea of bombarding Heidelberg- very pleasant city.

JEAN

Rather fight Germans than English.

PAUL

Why?

JEAN

You beat the Germans back across their border, they sign a truce, everyone's back in Paris by fall. The English, you have to drive them all the way to the coast, they take ship, leave, come back, and start the whole damn thing over again. And suppose you're captured? Think about English food...

PAUL

Wait, now- we're allied with the English! Aren't we?

JEAN

I guess so...

D'ALBERT

What day is it?

PAUL

Tuesday.

D'ALBERT

Then we are likely still allied with the English.

JEAN

Ever fight around Strasbourg? That's an agreeable town.

D'ALBERT

Jean, any town in Germany would be agreeable- if, say.. the Italians lived there-

PAUL

Ever fight in Flanders?

JEAN

Good wine, bad brothels...were you ever in the Low Country?

PAUL

Bad wine, fair brothels...

D'ALBERT

D'you remember Brussels?

JEAN

Ahhh...

PAUL

Wonderful wine...

ALL

Terrific brothels..

D'ALBERT

Some with superb wine, as I recall...

(Maupin enters, tired, and sinks down unnoticed, signals the tavernmaid for a glass.)

JEAN

Louis Joseph d'Albert de Luynes, how can we ever return you to your father, besmirched as you are with the lusts and vanities of this world?

D'ALBERT

I suggest, you lickspittle dugsuckers, that you take me back dead drunk and married to a marchioness- proof of God's mercy on the fools He has seen fit to favor-

MAUPIN

I suggest the proof of God's mercy might be a healthy crotch and the love of those who cannot defend themselves from the power of one's position..

D'ALBERT

If God wants your philosophy, young sir, perhaps he will make you a theologian.

MAUPIN

If God wants your sophistry, M'sieu, perhaps he will make you a Vatican eunuch. I will happily perform the first necessary operation.

D'ALBERT

How like a boy, to hope to mar what he may only envy-

MAUPIN

A grand conceit, that envy battens on the near-invisible-

D'ALBERT

Whoreson cur! You'll end on the gallows or dead of the pox!

MAUPIN

That depends, M'sieu, upon whether I embrace your politics or your mistress.

D'ALBERT

I demand satisfaction!

MAUPIN

No, m'sieu. *(She slaps him.)* I demand satisfaction. You wish vindication. Take it if you can.

D'ALBERT

Come then- play the fool if you must-

MAUPIN

Pray do not begrudge me, m'sieu. You've had a lifetime to play the fool.. I have only this afternoon,,,

(This is a duel of equals - D'Albert presses Maupin hard enough that she is calling on everything she has to survive- and when she finds her opening she takes it with force- running D'Albert through the left shoulder. Knowing that she is tiring, this is an all-or-nothing play. At the hit, D'Albert, stunned, turns to see the sword's point over his shoulder. and when Maupin withdraws the blade, sinks to the floor, his good arm reaching reflexively to Maupin for support, carrying her with him. During the short, painful journey he learns a surprising thing- his opponent's gender.

D'ALBERT

Ahhhhh...

(A sigh more of wonder than pain . Jean and Paul rush to his side,

JEAN

(Inspecting the wound)

It's bad-

PAUL

Say the word and I will gladly butcher this boy for you.

D'ALBERT

It would be churlish. And,- you could not do it. Is honour satisfied, ...chevalier?

MAUPIN

(A curt bow.)

M'sieu.

(She sheaths her sword.)

D'ALBERT

Bear me up-

(Maupin helps to raise D'Albert. Jean and Paul stare at her in surprise.)

MAUPIN

(With a shrug.)

I have damaged him. It is my duty to see him repaired.
(They carry D'Albert to a table and lay him out.)