

The Merry Widow

THE STORY OF THE PLAY

At a ball at the Pontevedrian Embassy in Paris, Baron Zeta awaits with impatience the arrival of Anna Glavari, who has just inherited twenty millions from her late husband, a Pontevedrian banker. The Baron is instructed that the retention of the widow's fortune is essential for the solvency of his country. He decides that they must find a Pontevedrian husband for the widow and sends for Danilo, who spends most of his time entertaining the *grisettes* at Maxim's. Several flirtations are going on, including one between Camille and Valenciennie (the Ambassador's wife), who protests that she is a "highly respectable wife".

Anna captivates all on her arrival and, meeting Danilo, recognises him as her former admirer whose aristocratic parents forbade their youthful love affair. Their love revives, but her money is a bar to his admitting it, and she waits for a declaration from him, "I love you". In the endeavour to find a Pontevedrian husband for Anna, a number of Embassy intrigues are exposed and Valenciennie encourages Camille to pay court to the widow, as a cover for their own affair. The prospect of Camille, a foreigner, winning the widow upsets the Baron and, on hearing that he is already involved with a married woman, he enlists Danilo's aid to discover who she is.

At a party in Anna's garden, Camille has persuaded Valenciennie to meet him in a garden pavilion and the Baron, peeping through the keyhole, recognises his own wife. He orders the couple out in the open and the situation is saved by Anna, who has changed places with Valenciennie in the confusion and she announces that she has decided to marry Camille. Danilo is furious, bids Anna a scornful goodbye and seeks consolation at Maxim's.

As an inducement to Danilo, Anna has arranged her garden to resemble Maxim's and, with the connivance of Njegus, Danilo is brought blindfold by real *grisettes* to the party. He appreciates the compliment Anna has paid him and declares she should give up Camille as her millions must stay in the Fatherland. She agrees and tells him that the pavilion incident was a deception to save a friend. Danilo is overjoyed but cannot bring himself to speak the words she longs to hear.

The Baron declares he will divorce Valenciennie and proposes to the widow. Anna tells him that she automatically loses her fortune if she marries again; Danilo tells her he loves her for herself alone. Anna, having received the declaration, explains that she loses the money because it becomes the property of her husband.