

The Duchess of Malfi Summary

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Plot Summary

The Duchess of Malfi is a tragic play by John Webster. It shows a world full of corruption, cruelty, and revenge. The play takes place in Italy at the court of Malfi. The society is ruled by greedy and selfish nobles. The court is filled with dishonesty and evil plots. Power and money are more important than honesty or kindness. Rulers like the Cardinal and Ferdinand use their power for personal gain. They do not care about justice or the feelings of others. This creates a society where people must pretend and betray each other. In this way, the play presents a "decadent" world with decaying morals.

Theme of Corruption and Portrait of Society: Corruption is present at every level of Malfi's court. Even good deeds are ignored or punished. People only act to increase their wealth or rise in rank. Antonio compares the court to a fountain, from which clean water should flow. But if there is any garbage or poison at the head of the fountain, dirty water, poisonous water, flows from it. Similarly, if a society is ruled by a corrupt person, most of the people in that society become corrupt. Bosola, an underpaid and bitter servant. He complains about unfair reward. He wants to do right, but is forced into dishonest work. The Cardinal, who should be holy, is greedy and full of secrets. Ferdinand, the Duchess's twin brother, is proud and cruel. They fear their sister's freedom and try to control her life. Their main worry is about their family's honor and not true care for her. Corruption poisons family ties, showing how far society has fallen.

Introduction to Key Characters and Their Roles: Major characters of the play are the Duchess, Antonio, Bosola, Ferdinand, and the Cardinal. The Duchess is young, kind, and brave. She rules Malfi after becoming a widow. Antonio, her steward, is loyal and honest. Bosola is hired as the Duchess's "horse manager" but is really a spy. The Cardinal is her cold, powerful brother. Ferdinand is violent, jealous, and inattentive to his sister's choices. Bosola is complex and acts as a Machiavellian villain. He serves the brothers, spies, and does cruel deeds for reward. But he is also thoughtful, sad, and feels guilty for his actions.

Marriage and Secret Love: At the start, the Duchess is a widow with two powerful brothers. Her brothers warn her not to marry again. They say women who marry twice are untrustworthy. The Duchess promises not to marry but secretly plans to do so. This leads to the famous wooing and marriage scene. The Duchess asks Antonio to marry her in her private

room. Cariola, her maid, watches as a witness. The Duchess gives Antonio her wedding ring. Antonio is surprised and feels unworthy, but he agrees to marry her. They are secretly married in a “chamber contract,” which is a legal bond. The marriage must be kept hidden to protect Antonio from her brothers’ anger.

Growth of Suspicion and Bosola’s Role: Time passes, and the Duchess has children with Antonio. Bosola, who works for Ferdinand and the Cardinal, begins to suspect the Duchess. He is suspicious because of her changing behavior and health. Bosola uses tricks. He offers the Duchess apricots to see if she is pregnant. When the Duchess falls ill, Bosola is sure his guess is right. Antonio and Delio protect the secret by spreading false stories. Bosola is clever, watchful, and always looking for proof. He acts as a classic Machiavellian villain. He is scheming, opportunistic, and working for personal gain. Yet, he sometimes feels regret and shame for the wicked tasks he does.

Plots, Discovery, and Exile: However, Bosola discovers evidence of the Duchess’s secret child. He finds a letter that gives the time and date of the heir’s birth. Bosola now feels sure and writes to Ferdinand and the Cardinal in Rome, revealing all. They are furious when they hear about the children. They decide to punish the Duchess severely. He acts kindly in public but is full of secret rage. He tries to force the Duchess to marry a nobleman named Malatesti. In private, he accuses the Duchess of being dishonorable. When Bosola confirms that the Duchess has children, Ferdinand arranges to attack her rooms at night. Ferdinand confronts the Duchess in her own room and gives her a dagger. The Duchess confesses she is married but does not reveal her husband’s name. Ferdinand insults her and tells her to hide her husband forever. The Duchess and Antonio are forced to separate. Antonio is accused of cheating and sent away; his property is taken from him. Bosola learns that the Duchess truly loves Antonio and has three children. Bosola seems to admire her courage. The Duchess plans to escape to Ancona, pretending to take a pilgrimage. But her brothers follow their every move.

Banishment, Betrayal, and Capture: Antonio and the Duchess try to escape with their children. The Cardinal and Ferdinand spread rumors and used their power to get them exiled. The Duchess loses her dukedom and wealth. She is banished from Ancona with Antonio and the children. Religious ceremony is used as a cover for political actions. The Cardinal takes the Duchess’s wedding ring as a symbol of victory. The Duchess and Antonio are left with no power and few friends. The brothers’ cruelty shocks those who witness it. The Duchess gives Antonio her last advice through Cariola. The Duchess asks Cariola to “give my little boy some syrup for his cold, and let the girl pray before sleep.” This advice shows the Duchess love and care for her children, even in danger.

Bosola, still serving the brothers but growing more thoughtful, arranges for armed guards to capture the Duchess and her children. Antonio and his eldest son escape, but the Duchess, Cariola, and her younger children remain. They are imprisoned.

The Duchess's imprisonment and torment: In prison, the Duchess is treated with cruelty and trickery. Bosola tells Ferdinand how the Duchess bears her sufferings bravely. Ferdinand tries to break her spirit. He visits at night, gives her a dead man's hand, and shows wax figures of Antonio and her children, pretending they are dead. The Duchess is heartbroken and wishes only for death. Bosola tries to comfort her, but his efforts are weak. The Duchess, full of despair, curses her brothers for their evil. Ferdinand enjoys her pain and plans new tortures. He sends madmen to dance and shout outside her room, hoping to drive her insane. The Duchess accepts her suffering with dignity. She talks with Cariola about life, death, and the afterlife. It shows her strength and goodness. These scenes are filled with melodramatic elements such as darkness, horror, wild emotions, and cruel tricks. Melodrama means sensational drama with exaggerated emotions, cruelty, and sudden twists. The play uses these devices to shock and move the audience.

Death of the Duchess, Cariola, and Her Children: At last, Bosola enters dressed as a tomb-maker. The Duchess calmly asks him about death and her funeral. Executioners arrive with ropes and a coffin. The Duchess forgives her killers and says she is not afraid of death. She knows she will soon join "excellent company in the other world." She goes to her death bravely, dying by strangulation. Cariola is brought in next and begs for her life, saying she is "quick with child"—pregnant—but the executioners do not spare her. The Duchess's children are also killed. Webster shows extreme cruelty and the melodramatic horror of this tragic world. The Duchess faces her doom with courage and patience. She blessed her children and servants with her last words.

Ferdinand's Reaction and Bosola's Guilt: Ferdinand comes in and sees the bodies. At first, he is shocked and starts to blame Bosola. He talks about being twins with the Duchess and feels their lives are connected. He regrets not saving her. Then, he turns his anger on Bosola. He calls Bosola a villain and tells him to leave. Bosola, now full of guilt. He says he served Ferdinand faithfully but hates what he has done. He realizes that working for evil men brings only ruin and shame. He wishes to undo the harm and prays for the soul of the Duchess. The Duchess is glorified in her suffering. She showed forgiveness, dignity, and faith, even until the end.

Downfall of the Brothers and Revenge: After the Duchess's death, madness and guilt overtake her brothers. Ferdinand becomes mentally ill, imagining he is a wolf. The Cardinal

feels haunted by his crimes and tries to hide the truth. Both brothers turn against each other and their allies. Bosola learns the full truth of their plans and regrets his villainy. Julia, the Cardinal's mistress, finds out about the Cardinal's secret, so the Cardinal kills her by mixing poison with the Bible. Bosola, now despising the Cardinal, plans revenge.

Meanwhile, Antonio returns to the royal court, hoping to solve all the problems. Bosola also goes there with the aim of revenge. But Antonio is killed by Bosola by mistake in the dark. Bosola is heartbroken—he never meant to kill Antonio. Rage and guilt push Bosola to act. He breaks into the Cardinal's room and attacks him. Ferdinand arrives in a fit of madness and chaos. In the struggle, the Cardinal and Ferdinand are both killed. Bosola is also fatally wounded and dies.

Ending: Finally, Delio arrives with Antonio's young son, wanting to restore the boy's rights. Delio and the nobles promise to support the boy as the rightful heir. The story ends with a lesson: Integrity and goodness are the only true sources.

Details Summary

The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster

Act- I

Scene I: Antonio Returns and Bosola Complains: Antonio returns home from France. Delio welcomes Antonio and asks about France. Antonio praises the French king's wise and honest rule. He says rulers should keep their court clean. Bad leaders spread trouble throughout the whole land. Bosola enters, upset with the Cardinal. Bosola feels the Cardinal ignores his service. The Cardinal tells Bosola to be honest. Bosola complains about the rich and corrupt leaders. He is bitter and feels lowly men are neglected. Delio says Bosola once served prison for murder. It is rumored that the Cardinal helped release him. Antonio thinks Bosola's sadness ruins his good side.

Scene II: Ferdinand Plots and Bosola Is Hired: The court fills with nobles and visitors. Delio asks Antonio about the main courtiers. Ferdinand, the Duchess's brother, enters and gives Antonio a jewel for winning a game. The nobles joke about war and court life. Ferdinand praises Antonio's horsemanship. The Cardinal and Duchess enter. Delio asks Antonio about the Cardinal and Ferdinand. Antonio explains that the Cardinal is dishonest and plots against people. He says Ferdinand is cruel and uses power unfairly. Antonio praises the Duchess for her kindness and virtue. Ferdinand asks the Duchess to hire Bosola for a court job. Ferdinand and the Cardinal secretly plan to use Bosola as a spy. They tell Bosola to watch the Duchess closely and report whom she might marry. Bosola understands he is being used for bad deeds. He

accepts the job but feels troubled. He is now the Duchess's horse manager and a spy for her brothers.

Scene III: The Duchess Secretly Marries Antonio: Ferdinand and the Cardinal warn the Duchess not to remarry. They say women who marry twice are not good. The Duchess promises never to marry again. Her brothers do not trust her promise and threaten her reputation. The Duchess says their words will not change her mind. She secretly plans to marry Antonio. Cariola, her servant, promises to keep the secret. The Duchess calls Antonio and talks about marriage. She gives him her wedding ring. The Duchess asks Antonio to marry her. Antonio feels unworthy but agrees. They privately marry with Cariola as a witness. The Duchess and Antonio become husband and wife in secret. Cariola feels worried about their risky decision.

ACT II

Scene I: The Duchess's Pregnancy Is Nearly Discovered: Bosola and Castruccio talk about being respected courtiers. Bosola mocks Castruccio for his ambition. Bosola insults an Old Lady about her looks. He says people hide their aging and fears. Castruccio and the Old Lady leave. Bosola notices the Duchess seems ill and suspects pregnancy. He buys her apricots to test his suspicion. Antonio and Delio speak secretly about the Duchess's marriage. Bosola acts friendly to Antonio but is really suspicious. The Duchess enters and asks for a special litter. Bosola hints strongly that she is pregnant. The Duchess eats the apricots and starts feeling ill. She leaves quickly because she feels unwell. Antonio and Delio worry she is in labor. Delio says they should tell others that Bosola poisoned her. They hope this excuse will protect her secret. Antonio follows Delio's plan, but feels confused and worried.

Scene II: The Duchess Gives Birth in Secret: Bosola is sure the Duchess is pregnant. He talks with the Old Lady about women's faults. The Old Lady leaves in a hurry. Antonio enters and orders the court gates shut. Antonio asks for all officers and their keys. Servants say there was a Switzer with a pistol in the Duchess's room. Antonio uses this story to explain why the gates are shut. He says jewels are missing, and everyone will be locked in their rooms. Antonio does this to hide the Duchess's labor. Bosola is confused about the real reason. Delio asks Antonio about the Duchess. Antonio says she suffers from pain and fear. Antonio tells Delio to go to Rome. He trusts Delio as a good friend. Cariola enters and tells Antonio he has a son. Antonio is very happy and thankful. He says he will check his son's fate.

Scene III: Bosola Learns About the Duchess's Baby: Bosola hears a woman scream and thinks it is from the Duchess's room. He suspects something secret is happening in the court. Antonio appears, holding a sword and looking worried. They both pretend not to know about

the noise. Bosola says he was just saying prayers but is really suspicious. Antonio warns Bosola not to go near the Duchess's rooms. Antonio tries to hide the truth and accuses Bosola of poisoning. Bosola and Antonio argue. Antonio's nose starts to bleed, but he says it is just an accident. Antonio leaves and makes sure Bosola cannot get close to the Duchess. Bosola finds a paper Antonio dropped. It contains the date and time of the Duchess's baby's birth. Bosola realizes the Duchess has had a child in secret. He decides to send news to her brothers in Rome. He is pleased he has discovered their secret.

Scene IV: The Cardinal and Julia's Secret Affairs: The Cardinal and Julia meet in secret in Rome. The Cardinal asks Julia how she left her husband. Julia says she used a story about devotion. The Cardinal warns Julia not to be jealous. Julia worries he might leave her. They talk about trust and women's loyalty. Julia wants to return to her husband. The Cardinal flatters her and says she should thank him for more freedom. A servant enters and says Julia's husband is in Rome. Delio arrives, an old suitor of Julia. Delio jokes about her husband's bad journey. He offers Julia some money, not from her husband, but from himself. Julia is playful and clever in her replies. Another servant comes and says Julia's husband looks upset after getting a letter. Julia leaves to see her husband. Delio fears the letter means Antonio is in trouble. Delio thinks Antonio's ambition will bring him trouble. Delio worries about what will happen next.

Scene V: Ferdinand and the Cardinal Learn the Duchess's Secret: Ferdinand and the Cardinal receive a letter about the Duchess's child. Ferdinand is furious and says his sister is ruined. He wants to destroy her reputation and feels ashamed. The Cardinal tells him to stay calm and not speak so loudly. Ferdinand wishes he could take revenge and punish the Duchess with violence. They both worry about their family's honor. Ferdinand's anger is wild and violent. The Cardinal says such anger is ugly and warns him to control it. Ferdinand wants to find out who the father is. He tells the Cardinal he will not rest until he punishes his sister. They both leave, planning how they will punish the Duchess and her lover.

ACT III

Scene I: Rumors and Secrets at Court: Antonio and Delio meet and talk about the Duchess. Delio asks about the Duchess's well-being. Antonio shares that she now has two more children. Delio wonders if the Cardinal knows this news. Antonio fears Ferdinand suspects something. Antonio says people at court believe bad rumors about the Duchess. Some think Antonio is getting rich unfairly. No one suspects he is really the Duchess's husband. Ferdinand enters and pretends to care for his sister. He suggests she marry Count Malatesti. The Duchess privately asks about rumors hurting her honor. Ferdinand pretends he does not believe the rumors. The Duchess feels comforted by his words. After she leaves, Ferdinand reveals he thinks she is

guilty. Bosola tells Ferdinand there are rumors the Duchess has three secret children. Ferdinand ignores ideas about magic and plots to catch the Duchess. Bosola has a key to her room. Ferdinand says he will get proof that night. They both plan to discover the Duchess's secret life.

Scene II: Ferdinand Discovers the Duchess's Marriage and Plots Revenge: The Duchess, Antonio, and Cariola are together in the Duchess's room. The Duchess playfully tells Antonio he cannot stay the night. Antonio jokes and asks Cariola about marriage. Antonio and Cariola leave, and the Duchess talks to herself. Ferdinand secretly enters and surprises the Duchess. He gives her a dagger and warns her harshly. The Duchess admits she is married, but Ferdinand does not want to know her husband's name. He demands that her husband hide forever. Ferdinand says her reputation is ruined and leaves in anger. The Duchess shows Antonio the dagger and tells him they are in danger. Bosola arrives, and the Duchess pretends Antonio is a dishonest steward. She accuses Antonio of financial crime to protect him. The Duchess tells Antonio to flee to Ancona. She arranges for her money and jewels to follow him. Officers are called, and Antonio is publicly dismissed. The officers criticize Antonio after he leaves. Bosola says the officers once flattered Antonio but now turn against him. The Duchess and Bosola discuss Antonio's character. The Duchess reveals that Antonio is her husband and she has three children with him. Bosola is surprised and praises her choice. The Duchess puts Bosola in charge of her money and asks him to follow Antonio. Bosola suggests the Duchess should pretend to take a religious trip so her escape looks noble. Cariola prefers other plans, but the Duchess decides on Bosola's idea. The Duchess prepares to leave for Ancona, hoping to avoid more sorrow. Bosola plans to tell Ferdinand everything to gain a reward.

Scene III: The Duchess and Antonio Are Banished: The Cardinal and Ferdinand talk with other nobles about war. They joke about Count Malatesti and his lack of bravery. Bosola enters, and the others notice his arrival. The nobles talk about Bosola's strange habits. Ferdinand and the Cardinal discuss the Duchess's escape to Ancona. They are upset that she pretends to make a pilgrimage. They decide that her children are shameful. The Cardinal wants the Duchess and Antonio banished from Ancona. Ferdinand says he will not go to the ceremony and wants a letter sent to the Duchess's oldest son. Ferdinand insults Antonio and calls him low-born. He orders soldiers ready to follow him. They all leave to continue their plans against the Duchess and Antonio.

Scene IV: The Duchess and Antonio Are Banished from Ancona: Two pilgrims arrive at the shrine and talk about its beauty. They say the Cardinal will stop being a cardinal and become a soldier. The Duchess comes to the shrine with Antonio and their children. There is a big ceremony at the shrine. The Cardinal and the state of Ancona, without speaking, banish the

Duchess and Antonio. A song about honour and fame plays during the ceremony. The pilgrims are surprised that the Duchess married someone like Antonio. They feel the Cardinal is too cruel. The pilgrims wonder if Ancona has the right to judge the Duchess. They say her brother convinced the Pope to take her land away. The Cardinal took the Duchess's wedding ring for revenge. The pilgrims pity Antonio and believe that fate and cruelty bring him down. They leave, feeling sad for the Duchess and Antonio.

Scene V: The Duchess and Antonio Are Separated and Captured: The Duchess, Antonio, their children, and friends are sad about being banished. Their servants have mostly left them. The Duchess dreams of her crown turning to pearls, which Antonio says means tears. Bosola arrives with letters from Ferdinand. The Duchess reads, understanding Ferdinand wants Antonio dead. Antonio refuses to meet Ferdinand and fears for his life. The Duchess advises Antonio to take their eldest son and flee to Milan. They part sadly, hoping for a better future. Armed men led by Bosola return and capture the Duchess and her remaining children. Bosola tells the Duchess she will never see Antonio again. The Duchess bravely faces her fate, ready to suffer more misfortune. Bosola and his guards take the Duchess and her children away.

ACT IV

Scene I: Ferdinand Torments the Duchess in Prison: Ferdinand asks Bosola how the Duchess acts in prison. Bosola says she is sad but noble and faces her misery bravely. Ferdinand says the Duchess seems proud even in her sadness. He orders Bosola to tell her he is coming and wants no lights in her room. Ferdinand enters in the dark. He gives the Duchess a dead man's hand with her ring. The Duchess is shocked but kisses the hand. Ferdinand says the hand and ring are signs of his forgiveness. He suddenly leaves and asks for lights to be brought in. The Duchess sees fake bodies of Antonio and her children and believes they are dead. Bosola says the bodies are to show that her loss cannot be fixed. The Duchess feels she has nothing left to live for and wants to die. Bosola urges her not to despair and offers to save her life. The Duchess rejects his comfort and feels hopeless. She says she will pray and then decides to curse her brothers. She wishes they are remembered only for their evil. Bosola tells her not to be unkind, but the Duchess longs for death. Ferdinand returns and is pleased by her suffering. He explains the bodies are just wax figures. Bosola begs Ferdinand to end his cruelty, but Ferdinand plans even more torments. He says he will send mad people to disturb the Duchess further. Bosola says he cannot visit her again. Ferdinand says Bosola must go to Milan soon to deal with Antonio. Both men leave, with more cruelty planned.

Scene II: The Duchess and Her Children Are Murdered: The Duchess and Cariola hear wild noises from madmen placed by Ferdinand. The Duchess says madness and noise keep her

from losing her mind. She wants to hear sad stories to lessen her own misery. She asks Cariola if they will know each other in heaven. The Duchess says she is not mad, though her suffering is great. A servant comes and says Ferdinand brings madmen as a cruel joke. The madmen act foolishly, singing and talking nonsense. Bosola enters, pretending to be an old man. He tells the Duchess he is here to make her tomb. He explains death is near and describes the misery of life. Executioners enter with a coffin and ropes. Bosola sings a sad song about death. Cariola cries and tries to defend the Duchess, but is pulled away. The Duchess calmly forgives her killers. She is not afraid to die and says she will meet good company in the next world. The Duchess is strangled.

Cariola is brought back to be killed. She fights, begs, and claims to be pregnant, but is strangled too. The children are also murdered. Ferdinand enters and asks if the Duchess is dead. He seems regretful and calls Bosola a villain for following his deadly orders. Ferdinand says his anger came from his sister's marriage, which ruined his selfish plans. Bosola asks for a reward, but Ferdinand only offers a pardon for the murder. Then he blames Bosola for the death. Bosola says Ferdinand's own cruelty and evil bring this guilt. Ferdinand tells Bosola to go far away, but Bosola says he served him faithfully, even though he hated the evil acts. Ferdinand leaves, and Bosola is left alone, feeling deep regret for his part in the murders. Bosola hopes to undo the wrong but finds the Duchess briefly alive again. Bosola tells her that Antonio is safe and that their children were fake, but the Duchess dies for real. Bosola mourns the Duchess and feels sorrow and guilt. He decides to give her body a proper burial and to go to Milan to fix things.

ACT V

Scene I: Antonio's Hope and the Loss of His Land: Antonio asks Delio if he can trust the brothers' offer of safety. Delio doubts it and suspects a trap. Delio explains that Antonio's lands are being taken by Pescara and his followers. Antonio is worried, but Delio tries to find out more. Delio asks Pescara for some of Antonio's land. Pescara refuses to give it to a friend, but then gives it to Julia, following the Cardinal's request. Pescara explains that the land was taken from Antonio through injustice. He says it is only suitable as a reward for a mistress, not a friend. Pescara teaches Delio that noble gifts should be noble. Antonio hears of Ferdinand's sickness. Pescara leaves to visit Ferdinand. Antonio decides to risk everything by visiting the Cardinal himself at night. He hopes seeing him might bring peace or end his suffering. Delio promises to stand by Antonio, whatever happens. They leave together.

Scene II: Ferdinand's Madness and the Cardinal's Plot: Pescara asks the Doctor about Ferdinand's health. The Doctor explains Ferdinand suffers from lycanthropia and thinks he is a

wolf. Ferdinand acts mad, howling and attacking his own shadow. The Doctor tries to calm him but fails. Ferdinand strikes the doctor and leaves. Pescara worries about Ferdinand's strange madness. The Cardinal blames a family curse for Ferdinand's state. Pescara and others leave. The Cardinal privately tells Bosola to find and kill Antonio. Bosola agrees to find him and asks how to do it. The Cardinal gives many ideas on how to trace Antonio. Julia appears and tries to flirt with Bosola. She carries a pistol but only wants to confess her love. Bosola flatters her and tells her to ask the Cardinal why he is sad. Julia agrees to help Bosola find out the Cardinal's secrets.

Julia asks the Cardinal what troubles him. She insists on knowing the truth. The Cardinal warns her it is dangerous, but she insists. The Cardinal confesses that he ordered the Duchess and her children to be murdered. Julia reacts with horror, and the Cardinal kills her by poisoning the holy book she kisses. Julia forgives the Cardinal and tells him she overheard his secret. Bosola enters too late to save her. The Cardinal realizes Bosola knows the truth and plans to use him in more evil deeds. He promises Bosola rewards if Antonio is killed. Bosola agrees on the surface but feels regret inside. The Cardinal plans to cover up Julia's death and gives Bosola a key for their plots. After the Cardinal leaves, Bosola wishes to protect Antonio from danger and considers taking revenge for the Duchess's death. Bosola is haunted by guilt and wants to do right at last.

Scene III: Antonio Hears an Ominous Echo at the Ruins: Antonio and Delio visit some ancient ruins near the cardinal's window. Delio describes how the echo there answers so clearly it seems like a spirit. Antonio enjoys the ruins and thinks of past people buried there. He says everything—even churches and cities—must eventually die. The echo repeats some of Antonio's sad words. The echo sounds like Antonio's wife's voice, making him sad. Delio warns Antonio not to visit the cardinal tonight. The echo repeats, "Do not," giving a warning. Antonio feels he cannot escape his fate. The echo tells him, "Fly your fate!" Antonio wishes to see his wife and children again, but the echo replies, "Never see her more." Antonio feels hopeless but decides he will take a risk and not live in fear. Delio leaves to get Antonio's son. Antonio is left with Delio's hope for his safety and the warning of the mysterious echo.

Scene IV: Antonio Is Killed by Mistake: The Cardinal tells his men not to watch over the sick Ferdinand that night. He wants privacy to move Julia's body secretly. The others agree not to go near, even if they hear strange noises. The Cardinal plans further evil, feeling troubled in his conscience. Meanwhile, Bosola overhears that the Cardinal wants him dead. Ferdinand appears and talks about strangling as a method of death. Bosola realizes his own life is now in danger. Antonio, with his servant, arrives nearby. He hopes to find the Cardinal praying and ask for forgiveness. Bosola, thinking someone is coming for him, stabs Antonio in the dark. Antonio

realizes he is dying, but says he can finally be himself. Antonio's servant brings a lantern and calls out. Bosola discovers he has wounded Antonio, the man he wishes he could have saved above all others. Bosola tells dying Antonio that his wife and children are dead. Antonio is glad to die with this sad news, as he has nothing left to live for. He regrets the emptiness of chasing glory and wishes his son would stay away from the courts of princes. Antonio dies. Bosola is heartbroken and tells the servant to move the body. He decides he will now confront the Cardinal and seek justice for all the wrongs.

Scene V: The Deaths of the Brothers and Bosola: Justice at Last: The Cardinal is alone, troubled by guilt, and thinking about hell. Bosola enters, bringing Antonio's body. The Cardinal is scared and tries to buy his life with promises. Bosola ignores him and blocks any escape. The Cardinal calls for help, but his men will not come because he previously told them not to. Bosola kills the servant to stop the rescue, then confronts the Cardinal with Antonio's body. Bosola tells the Cardinal, Antonio's death was a mistake and punishes him for killing his sister, the Duchess. Bosola stabs the Cardinal, who begs for mercy. The Cardinal is wounded but calls out for help. Ferdinand enters, confused and in a rage. He wounds both the Cardinal and Bosola during the fight. In revenge, Bosola kills Ferdinand. Ferdinand, dying, blames his and his brother's ambition for their deaths. Bosola, also dying, mocks the Cardinal's fall from power. Pescara, Malatesti, Roderigo, and Grisolan enter and see the scene. Bosola explains he killed the brothers for the death of the Duchess, Antonio, and Julia, as well as his own wasted life. The Cardinal dies, asking to be forgotten. Bosola, near death, tells them Antonio died by mistake and hopes dying in a just cause brings no harm. Delio enters with Antonio's young son. Delio regrets arriving too late but says they must secure the boy's future and restore justice. Delio claims integrity brings the only true lasting fame after death. All leave, realizing the tragic cost of ambition and revenge.