

First publication in the English language

PIRANDELLO'S

the mountain giants

AND OTHER PLAYS

*The New Colony · The Mountain Giants
When Someone Is Somebody*

the mountain giants

and other plays

by **LUIGI PIRANDELLO**

Translated by MARTA ABBA

Here, translated into English and published for the first time in this country, are three plays from the pen of the great Italian Nobel prize winner: *The Mountain Giants*, *The New Colony*, *When Someone Is Somebody*.

Mr. George Freedley, who has written the Foreword to this volume, comments on these plays as follows:

"The Mountain Giants (I giganti della montagna) was Pirandello's last play. This cosmographic drama, which he never finished, carries the essence of his philosophy. Its gigantic splendors have never been unveiled in America. It would take a Croesus or a Roger Stevens to dare its investiture, but just how rewarding it might be can be grasped even from its unfinished state. It has been suggested that Tennessee Williams, with his understanding of Italy and Italians, might well be the dramatist to complete this great work from the notes left by Pirandello. . . .

"The New Colony (La nuova colonia) was a political protest against Fascism as practiced by Il Duce, Benito Mussolini. Although the barbs were recognized, no censorial or political action was taken against Italy's greatest

(continued on back flap)

(continued from front flap)

dramatist. . . . The play was triumphantly revived in Naples in 1958, thirty years after its premiere, with Marta Abba as star. It is a political drama of universal interest. . . .

"When Someone Is Somebody (Quando si è qualcuno) is a brilliant study of our idolization of success in the modern world, in this case literary success. Pirandello amuses himself a little with spoofing the cult which had grown up around him. He was great enough to recognize the parallel to his own public literary career."

Marta Abba, the translator of these plays, was for many years the star of a company dedicated to playing and interpreting the works of Pirandello.

LIBRARY OF BEST PLAYS

Edited by **JOHN GASSNER**

*Sterling Professor of Playwriting and
Dramatic Literature, Yale University*

25 BEST PLAYS OF THE MODERN AMERICAN THEATRE: Early Series, 1916-1929

20 BEST PLAYS OF THE MODERN AMERICAN THEATRE: 1930-1939

BEST PLAYS OF THE MODERN AMERICAN THEATRE: Second Series: 1939-1946

BEST AMERICAN PLAYS: Third Series, 1945-1951

BEST PLAYS OF THE MODERN AMERICAN THEATRE: Fourth Series, 1952-1957

TWENTY BEST EUROPEAN PLAYS ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

\$5.75 per volume

THE MOUNTAIN GIANTS
AND OTHER PLAYS

THE MOUNTAIN GIANTS

AND OTHER PLAYS BY

L U I G I P I R A N D E L L O

Translated from the Italian by Marta Abba

CROWN PUBLISHERS, INC.

New York

© 1958 by Marta Abba

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 58-12870

Printed in the United States of America

*A Marta Abba, per non morire
To Marta Abba, so I shall not die*

LUIGI PIRANDELLO

I dedicate this book to the Theatre and to the Friends of the Theatre. This translation represents a small accomplishment compared with one that is monumental: the knowledge of one's having kept always to the path of art without having strayed into its commercial bypaths.

MARTA ABBA

FOREWORD

The writing magic of Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) permeated all of his work. To understand it you must recognize it as arising from his religious and philosophical background. For him life was a universal entity with innumerable facets, and his personal interpretation of these dazzled readers and audiences in his lifetime and has done so ever since. In Italian, the beauty of his language and the sound of his words are so melodious as to entrance the ears, and the infinite intricacies of his thinking and its literary expression puzzle, exasperate, and, finally, illuminate the senses. His art was and is extraordinary—even more so now, twenty-odd years after the death of this Nobel Prize winner in literature.

There are long and justly earned encomiums of his whole creative life in histories, encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, and even in separate biographical-critical works. Therefore that kind of foreword to these three great plays would be redundant. Marta Abba, the translator, was for many years the star of a company dedicated to playing and interpreting the works of Pirandello. She has contributed a factual memoir which explains a great deal about *Il Maestro*, as she reverently calls him. Through her energy and vitality, which are enormous, there has come into existence The Pirandello Society, of which this volume carries the first imprint. This Society will continue to foster the reading, enjoyment, publication, and producing of Pirandello's great dramatic works. A prize for the best essay written in English on an over-all critical appreciation of Pirandello's contribution to art, literature, and the theatre, with particular emphasis on the plays contained in

this volume, will be awarded in 1959, after due consideration by a distinguished group of judges. This prize has been established by Miss Abba in memory of her parents.

The Mountain Giants (I Giganti della Montagna) was Pirandello's last play. This cosmographic drama, which he never finished, carries the essence of his philosophy. Its gigantic splendors have never been unveiled in America. It would take a Croesus or a Roger Stevens to dare its investiture, but just how rewarding it might be can be grasped even from its unfinished state. It has been suggested that Tennessee Williams, with his understanding of Italy and Italians, might well be the dramatist to complete this great work from the notes left by Pirandello. With the interpretation provided by Marta Abba, Mr. Williams might make the conclusion of this drama as great as the preceding scenes. In its unfinished state it was produced in Italy, where it earned tremendous critical acclaim and was greatly appreciated by audiences.

The New Colony (La Nuova Colonia) was a political protest against Fascism as practiced by Il Duce, Benito Mussolini. Although the barbs were recognized, no censorial or political action was taken against Italy's greatest dramatist. He was considered just as sacrosanct as Il Senatore Benedetto Croce, the philosopher. The play was triumphantly revived in Naples in 1958, thirty years after its *première*, with Marta Abba as star. It is a political drama of universal interest, one of the few existing in modern world drama. Pirandello deals precisely with the subject of creating a perfect society on this earth. Perhaps it was this philosophy which enabled Mussolini to ignore the aspects of the drama which would have offended his Fascist soul.

When Someone Is Somebody (Quando Si E Qualcuno) is a brilliant study of our idolization of success in the modern world, in this case literary success. Pirandello amuses himself a little with spoofing the cult which had grown up around

him. He was great enough to recognize the parallel to his own public literary career.

The late Domenico Vittorini wrote, in *A History of Modern Drama* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1947), "Pirandello is a cosmic and universal entity that was boundless and unfettered, at the fringe of the finite world." This sums up Luigi Pirandello better than anything I have ever seen expressed in print.

George Freedley, President
The Pirandello Society, Inc.

August, 1958

CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Introduction	1
<i>The Mountain Giants</i>	31
<i>The New Colony</i>	101
<i>When Someone Is Somebody</i>	203

INTRODUCTION

I am speaking of Luigi Pirandello. And I am speaking of him in a place well suited to his personality—in the university of the mind. I feel no hesitation, for twenty years after his death he is more alive than ever.

At this very moment he is close by me. He will speak himself, not through the lips of his characters. He will speak in his own words of his anxieties, his torments, his joys, the few joys that he knew. Our correspondence covers ten years—from 1926 to 1936, a few days before his death.

But here he is.

We first find the Master in Rome, during a period of rest away from the cares of his company of the Odescalchi Theatre.

The company had behind it the triumphs of London, Paris, German-speaking Switzerland, Berlin, and other important German cities; the countless honors and festivities which everywhere had greeted Luigi Pirandello. Bonn, where he studied as a young man, had received him in his mature success with what might almost be called maternal love. Upon our return to Italy, however, the most bitter disappointment awaited us. Because of delays in the repayment of debts contracted for the rebuilding of the Odescalchi Theatre, which the government had promised to underwrite, the Theatre had to be closed. It was August, 1926. We were without our own theatre. The best and noblest undertaking which, in his youthful enthusiasm and generosity, through his own personal intervention, Luigi Pirandello had given to our country and to us actors was on the verge of failure.

But the Master is at work, and we watch him while in less than twenty days he completes two comedies: *Diana e la Tuda* and *L'amica delle mogli*. Here is what he writes:

“Thanks to a gift which I possess in the highest degree, that of abstracting myself from all contingencies of life, I have been able, in spite of these stormy days, to reread *Diana e la Tuda* and to rewrite the whole second part of the third act, with greater dramatic force and, I think, quite perfectly.”

Here, on the other hand, is the way in which he considers personal resentments, envies, the struggles which almost always accompany worthy undertakings and the life of great men:

“I could not be influenced by any considerations of personal advantage. Perhaps the only possible, or at least probable, agreement was one which would work to the national and not to my personal advantage. Namely, that my national project for the instituting of three State theatres be supported, without forcing the government to construct a new theatre in Milan. The Manzoni Theatre, once ceded to the State, which controls the Argentina in Rome and the Gualino in Turin, would become the third of the three State theatres planned.”

In this letter, for the first time, we hear the Master explain his project—a project which aimed at giving Italy a prose theatre worthy to stand besides its operatic theatre.

The Master propounds this project, comments upon it, and hopes for its realization in almost every letter of our correspondence—I might almost say to the very end of his days.

But let us continue. While the Master was in Rome writing new works for his company and fighting to give it its own headquarters, I was at my family's home in Milan studying

new parts: Fulvia Gelli in *Come prima, meglio di prima* and Ellida in Ibsen's *The Woman from the Sea*. The Master followed my efforts from afar. I must confess that twice I had been stopped by one of his characters, unable to make it come to life within me. Fulvia Gelli in *Come prima, meglio di prima* was one of these, perhaps because Fulvia's life on stage begins with a suicide, just like Ersilia Drei's in *Vestire gli ignudi*, which I had played for the whole first part of that same year and under whose spell I still stood. Finally, as a result of the natural process of growth and assimilation—a process which actors experience just like writers, painters, and sculptors—I was able to let the Master know that I was progressing with the part. This is what he writes in answer, laying bare the exquisite delicacy of his soul:

I always thought that you would give a wonderful interpretation of Fulvia Gelli in *Come prima, meglio di prima*. I never told you, inhibited by the lack of sympathy you had previously shown for this work of mine. Now I am happy that you will start working on it after *The Woman from the Sea*.

And now, as he reads my letters, the Master plays the part of professor, of professor at a girls' school more exactly, for he had taught many years at a teachers' college for girls in Rome:

Reading and rereading your letters, I feel more and more convinced that there is the making of a real writer in you. You *must* write, you absolutely must! You are somewhat weak, as women in general are, in spelling and especially in punctuation. But those are minor details and they can be learned.

He continues:

But what you really need is *will power, will power, will power*. I shall imbue you with it, through my own, of which

I have so much, so much that I have almost reached the second act of *L'amica delle mogli*.

He speaks again of the parts I am studying:

Up in the morning at six! You! And immediately to work! Yes, your probing into the part of Ellida is correct. There can be no doubt that her desire for liberty is desire for love. Her husband is old; the vast sea ever changing. The waves roll back upon themselves, break loudly and then flow back giddily, to turn over again, endlessly. I never understood the sea so well, I who carry so many of its vortex waves in my soul—ever changing! And I “feel” poor Ellida in exactly the way you do. Make her live as though the roar of the sea were echoing through her.

I am glad that my Fulvia Gelli, too—you tell me that you are getting to like her more and more—is beginning to become yours. In her case, too, I think there is much to be understood.

Then he speaks of his work:

But now I have become completely absorbed in *L'amica delle mogli*. I have just finished the second act. I won't tell you anything about it. You will read it. I have just begun the third act and I hope that it, too, will be finished in a few days. If so, I shall bring you a second play to Genoa, to put beside the first.

He adds:

Yesterday, Monday, at 4 P.M., the contract for the Argentina Theatre, which is to be ours, was signed. This is a matter of the greatest importance.

With that contract the Pirandello company, which had lost the Odescalchi Theatre, was again given its own headquarters.

Pirandello continues:

Meanwhile, tomorrow at 4, I shall have to go to the Argentina Theatre together with the engineer of the Governorship of Rome to decide about stage improvements and electrical equipment.

As can be seen, Luigi Pirandello was not satisfied with creating characters. With all his counsel, love, and vigilance, he tried to prepare a hall and stage worthy of the creatures of his fancy.

With this, Pirandello's correspondence for the year 1926 comes to an end.

I have no letters for 1927. During that time Pirandello was traveling with his company, which played in Italy during the winter of 1927 and spent the following summer on tour in South America. It was summer in Italy, but winter down in Buenos Aires, where the theatrical season reached its peak with our productions at the Odeon Theatre. It is no exaggeration to call our success phenomenal. Everywhere young people stood waiting for Pirandello, outside the theatre, at his hotel, in public lecture halls. They read his books and engaged in animated conversations. The city was full of interest for Italian things. On the streets even the children recognized Pirandello. After our South American tour we returned to Italy, landing at Naples, and meeting with great success there. The same happened in Sicily and elsewhere.

Ours was a large company, organized in answer to ambitious plans to play in large cities. Yet we were always sent off the main roads, along paths which had not been properly prepared for us and where the public was unable to respond properly to our particular kind of art.

The Master, even as he had been accompanying the troupe on its many moves, had written a new play, *La nuova colonia*, which had its *première* later in Rome.

Our correspondence resumes on July 4, 1928. We find the Master working on the drama *Lazzaro*:

I am writing you from Nettuno, where I have a beautiful room in this hotel, with a window overlooking the magnificent villa of the Borghese family. From the famous pine grove a terrace leads out to the sea. To the right is the port of Anzio, and far away in the distance, where the immense arc of the horizon comes to an end, the ancient castle of Astura. A feeling of peace pervades everything, the silence broken by the constant saw-like sound of the crickets and punctuated by the twittering of the birds among the pines close by. Beyond, the vast calmness of the sea glittering in the sun. If only I had my paints with me. In the magnificent denseness of the thick sunny clump are the gray skeletons of two enormous cypresses; one is a little slanted, very sad; the other is straight and powerful. What a pity it is to see it with its sharp, precise outline among the intertwining branches and leaves which used to crown its vigorous trunk, arid and barren now in the midst of its many living companions. I am sure that if I had brushes, paints, and easel, I would know how to give expression to the pain I feel. If you could only hear how thick and strident and insistent the screeching of the crickets is! And yet it is one of the beloved voices of summer.

He continues:

I am afraid of being left alone with myself. When I am alone, all the beasts of my menagerie wake up to devour me. And I don't know how to appease them. What anguish it is to look at life and to feel you may lose it!

Two days later he writes:

I am sure that by the middle of August, once this Calvary of our theatrical year is over, the road to achievement and

success will be open for us in Germany. I am most happy about it and can think of nothing else. In Rome I bought a great many books on Beethoven because of the idea you know about, and I have begun to read them. Magnificent visions are bound to come, things never seen before. Rest? I hope to be able to finish *Lazzaro* and then . . . and then . . .

The Master was thinking of motion pictures which, though still silent at the time, were beginning to experiment with sound. Pirandello's inexhaustible imagination had seen the wonderful possibility of combining musical sound with the projection on the screen of the images from which the composer had drawn his inspiration.

But while he was thinking of ways to create poetic beauty for the sound film, he was also thinking of the theatre, concerned as always for its future. He writes from Nettuno again:

I have just read in the *Corriere* that a meeting has been scheduled to be held tomorrow in Rome. Directors, impresarios, critics, etc., are to discuss the crisis of the theatre. I shall be in Rome tomorrow to see what it is all about.

But for the moment it seems useless to hope that any serious decision could be reached. There will be the usual inconsequential talk. If the government were really interested in doing something for the theatre, it should not bother consulting anybody. We have already had so many consultations, with so many different groups, and yet nothing has been accomplished. If they continue consulting people who, because of their divergent interests, will never be able to come to any agreement, it means that they wish to create the impression that they are interested in the theatre, but that, actually, nothing will be accomplished this time either. Who knows how much longer this state of affairs will last?

The only solution for me is to leave Italy for a while, and to return only when I am able to stand on my own feet,

when I no longer need anybody, when I can be my own master. There is nothing but mutual hatred here; in public as well as in private, machinations to keep anyone at all from getting that which everyone is shamelessly wishing for himself. Nothing but politics. Life in Italy has become unbearable. I must leave! And go far away!

Then he speaks of *Lazzaro* again:

Another day has passed. I cannot say that it has passed in vain for I worked all morning and part of the afternoon on the third act of *Lazzaro*, and I think that it is going well. Then I went down to the beach for a while. What a show of flesh! What women . . . ! The beach is narrow, and the sea encroaches upon it more and more every year. Everyone is crowded together—men and women—on that bit of dirty, pasty sand. What sights! What exhibitions! I went back up to my terrace, feeling sick. And I returned to reading about Beethoven's life and about his nine symphonies in preparation for the work you already know about. I think that it will turn into something magnificent. But I miss direct inspiration from the music. I shall have to find a way of listening once again to the nine symphonies, very attentively and one by one, perhaps with the help of some good records. Meanwhile, through my reading, I am able to understand the state of mind and the spiritual mood of the musician at the different moments of his work.

The Master's desire to leave Italy and to try his fortune in motion pictures became ever stronger:

Yes, my dear Marta, wonderful things can be done with the movies. I have been sure of it for quite some time. I am planning extraordinary things and I can hardly wait to organize my ideas so that something can be done with them. I shall come back, if I ever do come back, only when I no longer need anyone.

Here is what he says in another letter:

Don't imagine that I haven't given much thought, over and over again, and with good results, to the film scenario of *Sei personaggi*. I have it almost completely thought out.

Then there is the Beethoven idea, which could open up an utterly new field for motion pictures, the visual expression no longer of words but of music: melography. This is the road to success.

With this letter our correspondence for July, 1928, comes to an end. The Master returned to his company in Rome. But the company had only another month of life left.

In September the Master got ready to leave for Germany.

Rome, 1928—Dear Marta, last night X came to see me and he stayed till after midnight. He spoke of the state of confusion in which people are living because of the general feeling of insecurity. The tactic has become clear: whenever anyone in any field whatever seems to be headed for a place of importance, he may be ever so careful, avoiding the common pitfalls and guarding himself against intrigue, still things are arranged so that at a certain point he begins to feel isolated and exposed, awkward in every move he makes, in every gesture. In this way he is forced to step back into line, without anyone actually having openly urged him to do so. Sometimes it is gossip, vague accusations, open attacks that are leveled at him, engaged in at the right moment, mysteriously interrupted, then sparked again. In other cases, an official denial is issued just at the moment when a man is fully confident of having his position made secure. He is forced to step down in embarrassment and defeat. They do not want anyone to be in a position of command; no one must dare raise his head above the crowd. Around *him* all heads must be level, they must reach no higher than

his knees. So the situation naturally remains depressed and confused, and everywhere there is baseness and confusion. Nothing but doing and undoing, adding a stone and taking it away again. And the resulting sense of precariousness breeds discouragement and anguish.

After a three-hour-long conversation I felt more helpless than ever, overwhelmed and crushed.

Yes, I must leave. I must go abroad, breathe in some fresh air, work, get back the feeling of my own personality. I can't wait for the moment!

With these words of hope and confidence in the new life awaiting him abroad, our correspondence for 1928 comes to an end.

In 1929 Pirandello was in Berlin. His stay there lasted through June, 1930, interrupted at first by his trips to London and Paris and by his first return to Italy at the end of May.

Here he tells an amusing anecdote:

Yesterday I went to the Solaris. Aponte of the *Corriere* was there, Boiano of the *Popolo d'Italia*, and Ivo Pannaggi. We talked about this and that: the usual things, about Italy, about things here. But I heard a good story! A certain G—, president of some German organization in Rome, a big shot, had been invited to the Embassy (I was there the following day for lunch). Aponte and Boiano were invited in his honor. The Ambassador would have liked me to come too, but since I told him that I wouldn't be able to, he invited Rosso di San Secondo in my place. Now listen to this! At a certain point G—, to show that, even though a foreigner, he is up to date on what is happening in Italy, asked Rossi di San Secondo:

"And when shall we have the pleasure of seeing your *Cena delle Beffe* here in Berlin again?"

The Ambassador hurriedly intervened to cover up his illustrious guest's *faux pas*:

"I have been told that Mr. Rosso's *Il piacere dell'onestà* may be given here soon."

You can imagine Rossi di San Secondo turning all colors. He cleared his throat, attempted a smile, and said:

"No. Possibly *Marionette che passione.*"

G— breaks in:

"Marionettes? Oh yes, they are wonderful. I saw them at Podrecca's children's theatre. They are just wonderful!"

I came back home at three. No letters from anyone. Only a telephone call from my secretary, telling me to expect him. He was coming with a gentleman from Tonfilm for us to decide which parts of the film with the Chinese actress were to be spoken and which put to music.

They came at five. The gentleman is very tall, wears eye-glasses, his face is eroded by the sea air and his head perched on a long, long neck. He is a musician and an architect. Would you believe it? He has already prepared four Beethoven *symphonies* and two Chopin *nocturnes* for Tonfilm!

My idea has already been put into practice.

Now the way is open and I don't know what else there is left for me to do. I defended the priority of my conception in front of everyone. *My only consolation is that he will certainly be unable to give the kind of interpretation of Beethoven and Chopin that I could have given.*

The Ancients believed that at a certain point Jove weighed each man's destiny. In his inscrutable judgment he then decided whether it should continue to be as it was or whether it should be made to topple over. I think that it is quite a while now since I was weighed by Jove and made to topple. Nothing seems to go well any more.

Meanwhile, in Italy, a new institution was being organized, the Italian Academy. In Berlin Pirandello heard echoes of the preparations:

19 March 1929—Do you really think that it has been established—and has been for quite a while back—who the first thirty Academicians are to be? I am either among those thirty or else I have been excluded, and even if I had been in Rome I could not have moved one little finger to help myself. It would only have looked (and this without any practical result) as though I too had come running to recommend myself, eager to be taken into consideration, afraid that I might be slighted. If they have overlooked me, so much the worse! So much the worse for them and not for me, if the nomination depends not on the pure and simple, indisputable recognition of literary merits, but upon pressures, recommendations, and intrigues. It would have given me no satisfaction whatsoever to obtain the nomination on these terms. So why should I have tried? To outwit my enemies? If my enemies are so powerful that they can trample upon my merits, upon my work, upon my world-wide fame, then there is no longer any room for me in my own country.

In spite of his doubts, Pirandello was named a member of the Academy: "And so I am a member of the Italian Academy," he writes. "But do not think, my dear Marta, that I am any different because of that. I am still the same man."

His nomination resulted in immediate offers:

My position in Italy is completely changed—strengthened and corrected—and all because I am now a member of the Academy. They must have thought me dead and buried before; how else could this sudden change be explained? Just listen to what has happened. The "Ten" have asked me to be

editor-in-chief of the important new literary review they are going to publish and they will pay me well. I have an offer from X: 2,000 a month for two short articles, to be paid even if I don't actually submit them! X also offers that, if I wish, I can now be editor of a new militant literary weekly. Comm. Fedele told X that he sees no obstacle now to an agreement between D'Annunzio and myself, and that I shall be President of the Society of Authors in the very near future.

The Motion Picture Board is almost certainly going to ask me for an idea for a picture. In fact, they are considering appointing me as chief adviser on the selection of subjects to the Board itself. As for the State Theatres, it is absolutely certain that they will be organized in accordance with my proposals.

The Master cannot help but reflect bitterly on all this evidence of human weakness, but quickly he turns to more general considerations. He speaks of his attitude toward life:

If you fill your days with work, always more work, and permit no time, absolutely no time, for boredom and regrets, life will no longer seem so empty. You won't feel you are wasting your life if, every day, you find it alive within you, ready to feed your artistic passion, that passion which never rests, never tires, is never satisfied.

Last night, after all those thoughts that kept running through my mind and that I told you about, I could not sleep. I got up. *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* was lying on my desk. It had been lying there for quite some time, unfinished. I finished it, finished it in four hours of intense work. We shall win yet, there can be no doubt. We must win through the strength of our will power, our work, our excellence, our pride, our perseverance. We must never give up. Wait till I get back to Italy. After all, I shall have to come back. But only after I have been really successful here, in

motion pictures as well as in the theatre—completely successful—and this success will restore my prestige in Italy. Then I shall be able to go on with the battle, to complete and final victory.

Courage! Courage! Courage!

Now we come to the most interesting part of this correspondence: Pirandello's writings. We have watched him finish *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* in one sitting of four hours. Permitting himself no break, he started immediately on *O di uno o di nessuno*. Simultaneously, he speaks of *I giganti della montagna* for the first time, which, together with *La nuova colonia* and *Lazzaro* was to form the third and last "myth."

He writes still from Berlin:

April, 1929—I have started to write *O di uno o di nessuno* so as to round out my repertoire with comedies that any company can give. If I continue to feel like this and if my inspiration doesn't give out, I should be able to finish it soon. I see that this is the only way out, because I can't imagine which one of the Italian companies now being organized would be capable of playing *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*.

The same will hold true for *I giganti della montagna*, which I am still thinking about. I am strongly tempted to start upon this new "myth," the third and last. But for the moment I must control myself and think of practical things. I already see the scenes before me, one is better than the other; I see the characters, all of them, one by one, my imagination caresses them. Last night, when I could not sleep, I had already worked out the whole first scene, from beginning to end. God only knows how difficult it was to get up this morning and leave it all behind, and to take out, instead, the folder in which there are already twenty-four typewritten pages of *O di uno o di nessuna*.

Whenever the Master referred to "practical things," he was thinking of the necessity for making money. His finances were strained. He had not been paid the balance due him for the motion picture subject for the Chinese actress, and he was so short of money that he had had to pawn his watch and rings.

Upon my writing him, worried, he answered:

You suggest that I should change my way of living? But, Marta, my life has always been this way, not only now that I am no longer young, but always, even at twenty. As a matter of fact, now I am so much more active, in your meaning of the word. The only thing I have ever been able to do is to think beautiful and lofty things; often I succeeded in putting them into writing, sometimes not even that. As for things in practical life, I have always been most inept at taking care of them. There is no reason to complain about my fate and, for that matter, I don't complain. Only, I regret that things are the way they are because of those who know what I am like and yet act as though they didn't know, and expect things from me that I cannot give. I have had no personal gain from my work of the past forty years, and yet it has brought in a great deal of money. Others took it and made use of it. But I want to continue to work, always work, because I know that this is the only thing that I can do. I can't understand why they don't want my work to bring in money now as it did in the past. Just wait till I come back to Italy. We will organize the State Theatres. You can be sure of that. Either the State Theatres or the Community Theatres, in keeping with that other project of mine. . . . Perhaps this is my last blaze of inspiration and it will destroy me! If you only knew what I have thought of for *I giganti della montagna!* And how well *O di uno o di nessuno* is coming along. . . . My pen never skimmed over the pages as lightly and easily as now; it seems to have wings. . . .

When I write, it is as though I were floating on air, happy, as though I would never touch the earth again. . . .

He regrets that his new plays have not yet been produced in Italy.

Lazzaro has been finished for over a year and right now, in view of the reconciliation with the Vatican, it would be so very important for a courageous and salutary voice to be heard in Italy, a voice which would put the modern conscience at peace on the religious problem.

Pirandello was planning a brief trip to Italy, which he made shortly after. He had finished *O di uno o di nessuno*.

9 June 1929—You can't imagine how terrible these past days in Rome were. I am leaving now, feeling that I am making a complete and definitive break. I could not possibly live here.

He returned to Berlin and plunged into the usual occupations again—meetings with directors, lawyers, publishers. What most upset him and retarded him in his work was a disagreement with his German translator, with whom he was forced to break off because of the extremely poor quality of his work.

"These days will be completely taken up with business," he says. "I am impatient to get back to *I giganti della montagna*."

On one occasion, one of our mutual friends invited him to spend the evening at his house:

I went. The usual kind of women—pretty actresses, dancers of no account, dissipating girls; theatre managers, the son of the English ex-Minister Asquith (a very intelligent young man), and others. I stayed until half past twelve with only one result: I finally retrieved the umbrella that I had forgotten there many months before.

Berlin, 27 June 1929—Never have I wished for insanity as much as I do now. Only insanity can give what fate has

denied. Riches, happiness. . . . For the insane, possession of wealth is not an illusion, nor is the fulfillment of their wishes unreal. They have achieved happiness. The "child" that a poor mad mother is nursing may be made of common rags. What does it matter? From that rag she really receives all the joys of motherhood, and woe to him who takes it from her! It would be the most cruel of cruelties to say to her: "Wake up, you are dreaming!" When we sleep, all of us are insane. But in the insane the state of sleep continues even when their senses are awake.

I don't know why, as I am sitting here, musing, these thoughts have come to me. . . . Perhaps because these days—I don't know what it depends on—I am experiencing something rare for me: the pleasure and the anguish of dreaming. How wonderful it is to take one's revenge, while asleep, on the feelings of shame and on the sense of logic that plague one during the day! To turn all so-called undeniable truths upside down with the greatest tranquillity! To accept the most ridiculous contradictions of respectable truths with the deepest satisfaction! To multiply three by three and get eighteen, four by five and get sixty-nine, with the self-assurance of one who has achieved instinctively mastery over the most elementary and obvious notions and handles them with the utmost seriousness, without evoking mirth or laughter! If to dream is to be insane for a while, just think of insanity as a long dream and you will no longer question the happiness of the insane. . . . The insane, that is, who are not evil. For beware of the dream that turns into a nightmare! I have had bad dreams too, and unfortunately they last even after I am awake. . . . But enough of this.

As a result of his trip to Italy, an idea for a new play came to him. It was *Come tu mi vuoi* and had originally been part of *I giganti della montagna*. This is what he says about it:

As you know, it had become fused with *I giganti della montagna*. Now I must break it loose, extract it from the mountain, see it as a complete and independent whole, no longer as part of anything else. The special effort of concentration this requires is no simple matter. Will I succeed? I must, at all costs. I will put all the resources of my mind to work. This work will be the best I have ever done. With it I shall go down, all the way down into the very entrails of despair. If the public doesn't weep this time, it means their hearts are turned to stone.

September, 1929—I am still working on the second act of *Come tu mi vuoi*. I want it to be better than the first and I want the third to be better than the second. So far I think that things are going very well. I must control my imagination constantly because a strange thing is happening to me. The creatures of my imagination have become so alive, so *independent of me*, that I can no longer hold them back and make them stay inside the play I am constructing. They escape on their own account, they strain more than ever to get outside the role assigned to them, to do other things, chance things born of a momentary mood, as happens to us all in real life. To drag them back, each time, to put them back where they belong, requires an unbelievable effort that gets more difficult every time. Who knows what would happen if I were to let them act according to their whims, permitting them to do whatever they wish, whenever they wish to do it. . . . Oh Marta, not only do I have to put up with annoyances and disappointments caused by my fellow men, but I must even fight with my own characters.

October, 1929—Today I am very satisfied with the way *Come tu mi vuoi* is proceeding. I reread everything I wrote and I think it is good. Whenever something like this happens, life seems easier to bear.

In the autumn of 1929 the Master returned to Italy for the second time. He took *Come tu mi vuoi* with him, still unfinished. He finished it in Italy and it was performed for the first time at the Filodrammatici Theatre in Milan, where it met with great success. In December, 1929, while still in Italy, he writes:

If I have the energy, I shall go to Rome to take up the fight in favor of regional theatres once more. I must—I simply must—find the strength to do this one more thing. I would like to leave this accomplishment behind me, when I die! It is not something I am doing for my own benefit, but for our country, to preserve the nobility of our art.

We know nothing further of this plan. Pirandello returned to Berlin. *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* was to have its world *première* there in, Pirandello writes, “the foremost of Berlin theatres.”

But *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* was performed first in Königsberg. Pirandello was present at the performance.

“I was extremely well received,” he writes later, “in that snowbound city on the Russian border, the city of Kant. The performance was wonderful. The play is alive and powerful from the first line to the last. The hall was packed. . . .”

Meanwhile *Lazzaro* (the new version) was played in Rome by the Melato Company:

I already knew from a letter I had received before yours that *Lazzaro* was unfavorably reviewed in the Rome press. What can I do about it? I cannot think of anything I have done to bring out all this ill feeling against me. I have worked. In one year I contributed four plays to the dramatic literature of my country. Time will tell if they are alive and vital: they will survive. And my country will have to live down the shame of having misunderstood them and of hav-

ing treated me unjustly. But by now I am used to being insulted and it no longer hurts me.

In Berlin Pirandello became ill.

I want to call the reader's special attention to what followed. The Master was faced by a tremendous task. On the one hand, he was struggling to give new life to what he had created, trying to make *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* come alive on the stage, through the work of his actors. On the other hand, he was in the throes of a new creation (*I giganti della montagna*) and as he worked, an idea for a new subject appeared to him (*Quando si è qualcuno*). Finally, we have the artist faced by everyday problems, especially the ugly ones of money. But again spirit triumphed over matter, even though it may have seemed for a moment that art was defeated.

Berlin, April 6, 1930—I still have a temperature of 100.5 but there seems to be no longer any danger of pneumonia. The person who was least frightened of the danger was I. You will get this letter in Palermo.

Are you continuing with the Sicilian tour?

If you should happen to stop in Girgenti for a few days, go to say Hello to the pine at Caos and to the old house where I was born. I may never see them again!

Berlin, April 6, 1930—Finally the sun came out for a while today! I sat down at my desk again, after so many days. The pale sun is shining on it. Who knows how bright the sun is in Messina! How I would like to be in Sicily too! The years remaining to me are all involved in fundamental hopes that I cannot even speak about. . . . But my work will sustain my hopes. I have thought of a new play, to be called *Quando si è qualcuno*.

You tell me I should get back to my activities now, without worrying. I tried to this morning, but it was useless. *I Giganti della montagna* is lying here on my desk, half finished,

and the desk is littered with papers. Now this devilish idea of *Quando si è qualcuno* has gotten into my mind. Saturday, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* will be revived here.

It is raining. There is deep fog. And I am staying here, indoors, at the hotel, on doctor's orders.

But Pirandello did not heed the doctor's orders for long. Soon he left his hotel room and went out to rehearsals.

I am in the midst of a burning fever of work and I am beginning to feel like a god again! My health is improving; I feel I can count on it now. If I were to die now, I would not care, for I would die standing up, at work! Writing and rehearsals—rehearsals that are alive because the play is so full of vitality. You would hardly suspect it when reading it.

But he had to return to bed. He was ill again. Although he normally disliked parties and festivities, this time he regretted not being able to attend a reception given in his honor by the International Students' Association.

Postpone it? It is too late. And moreover one should never disappoint young people in their enthusiasm. Here, too, they like me, as everywhere else. You should see them come trooping to the theatre where we are rehearsing *Sei personaggi*.

The rehearsals are continuing but I haven't been able to go. You know how much depends on these Berlin performances. I simply can't stay at home and take care of my health when so many important matters are being decided. My body *must* obey me. Otherwise, what is the sense of living? I *must* get up, go out, get back to work!

He returned to rehearsals. But they tired him and he went back to his writing:

Whenever I raise my eyes from the sheet of paper before me, I see my bust. The sculptor Isenstein insisted upon giv-

ing me a plaster mold of it and I placed it on the console shelf of the enormous stove that is in my study, in the corner next to the door. With the plaster bust on it the stove looks like a funeral monument, and I can see myself as though in a cemetery. What a cheerful sight! But the bust is very beautiful.

I have started studying English, an hour a day. . . .

Today is Sunday, but we are having rehearsals all the same, from eleven in the morning to four. To talk, to give all one has. . . What an effort it is for me to make these German actors understand, in a language that it not my own, what my play means. They are fine actors, of course, but it takes all my energy to make them understand and do the correct thing. And then there is the question of a difference in temperament. Here, they scream at the top of their lungs where we would hardly whisper, and they whisper where we would scream. Nothing can be done about it. It is a question of a difference of nature, and since the play is to be given here it will have to reach the German public in the tone which is right for them, even if it is so very wrong as far as our sensitivity is concerned. The opening date has been set for the thirty-first, so we shall still have many rehearsals—about fifty in all. If we ever get to the end, I expect to be more dead than alive. I only hope that the play's success will make up for the enormous efforts all this costs me, in my present poor state of health.

He was skipping lunch, eating a sandwich, instead, in the pauses during rehearsals. He smoked too much. "I don't know how I manage to keep on my feet. It must be sheer will power."

Since he spent the whole day at the theatre, the only time left for writing was the night.

24 May 1930—I was up all night writing. At three o'clock I began to see the first flicker of dawn at the two windows

in the study. It was like a mystery, far far away, trying to show itself, but not quite sure whether it was going to or not. In the early light the black houses on the other side of Lutzof Square looked like mountains seen in profile. I had the same feeling—I don't know why—about this dawn as I had about another one, which I saw through the windows of a moving train, long, long ago. Far away, on the horizon, the hills were still in darkness. I felt some deep, mysterious pain. Pain for the whole of life, condemned to reawaken every morning from the oblivious sleep of night.

Last night the benefit of sleep was denied me. And the trip . . . has not my whole life been a journey, without rest, without points of arrival? Seated here, at my desk, in a strange house, far from my country, without a home anywhere on earth, without a bed of my own in which to sleep, I was surprised by the dawn which peered in through the two windows of my study, finding me as wide awake tonight as it had found me long ago, when it looked in through the windows of that train rushing through the night. Will my work ever recompense me for the pain this dawn has given me, drowning the bitterness of my own fate in the general bitterness of our useless mortal life? But let's not indulge in pointless philosophizing.

The date of the opening of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* was drawing nearer. We can observe the mounting tension in the following of the Master's letters:

I must confess that I am very nervous at the thought of the *première*. This is due to the bitter realization that I have become a *stranger to my own country* and that I shall therefore have to win *another home* for my art. Everything depends on this *première*. I so wish you could feel what I am doing with *I giganti della montagna!* I have taken your advice to heart. *I giganti della montagna* is the triumph of

the imagination! The triumph of poetry, and at the same time the tragedy of poetry forced to exist in the midst of the brutal modern world.

He went back to rehearsals. He writes:

Another sleepless night! I came back to the hotel from the last dress rehearsal this morning at half past four. What an illusion much-praised German "efficiency" has turned out to be! Everything is done at the last moment, exactly as in Italy! But we, at least, have the excuse of never having enough time and money to put on a performance. Here they have everything: time (one and a half months), an army of helpers of all sorts, and money. And yet last night (on the eve of the performance) I can't tell you how many things were missing . . . every five minutes there was another interruption. I realized what *we* would be able to accomplish with our alertness and open-mindedness if we had but a tenth of the means they can dispose of here. The performance will be magnificent, I have no doubt. One thing I noticed and it is worrying me—the total absence throughout the production of what we call "tempo"; "tempo," the Italian word taken from musical terminology, and which stands in that sense for "measure," "rhythm." My play is like a Tiepolo fresco, alive, as though moved by the wind, capricious. The director took up a tiny brush, instead, the brush of a miniaturist, of a Fra Angelico. He worried about every line, every word. Instead of looking at the whole, he got lost in a maze of details. Breadth, imagination are missing. It is a pretentious and pedantic interpretation. It may please the Germans, it doesn't please me. But enough. Tonight, at the *première*, what must be, shall be. There will be a huge crowd, such as you have never seen. I am calm, very calm, already far removed from the event.

Berlin, 1 June 1930—As I wired you, it was a stormy evening. I felt as though I were back at the *première* of *Sei personaggi* in Rome. But on that memorable evening the storm had been set loose by noble passions, it was the violent clash between youth and age. Last night, instead, what burst forth was the black envy of a gang of rascals, egged on by my ex-translator. This evil crowd very ostensibly tried out the whistles with which they came armed, in the lobby before the beginning of the show. Someone came running backstage to tell us about it and panic spread among the actors. Eventually, the reaction of the majority (about three-quarters of the audience) won out and a flood of applause and ovations broke loose. The troublemakers, having done what they had come to do, had left. And it became apparent, then, how few they had been, for the hall was still full. The whole audience were on their feet, shouting Bravo! and applauding frantically.

You see how right I had been to feel worried. I had a premonition of what was to happen. I remembered my ex-translator and that we had parted on bad terms. I had even been warned that something was afoot against me and the play. Last night I thought I was back in Italy. Everywhere I am pursued by hatred. Perhaps it is only right that this should be so, that I should die this way, annihilated by the hatred of triumphant cowards, by the incomprehension of idiots. After all they are the majority. The catcalls of idiots and of my enemies would not hurt me if my spirit were still what it used to be. But I have lost even the pride of my isolation, the love of my disconsolate sadness. . . . My two staring eyes remain inexorably fixed, despairing, proud, tired, heavy-lidded with a pain that no one will ever be able to understand or know.

A great, absolute immobility.

But every evening the theatre filled up. Every evening was a triumph. The major German writers, from Thomas Mann down, wrote to Pirandello enthusiastically. There were flowers and letters, many, many letters. Those who had tried to stand in his way went down in defeat and his success was all the more clamorous.

Our correspondence continued for another six years, as long as Pirandello lived. But we shall no longer follow the Master step by step, as we have done so far. It is no longer necessary. We shall merely touch upon the high points of his life, a life spent as before—traveling, working, struggling.

From the end of 1930 to the beginning of 1932 the Master lived in Paris. The Parisian public and the press honored him with exceptional demonstrations of esteem: festivities at which the Minister of the Interior participated, thereby showing his good will toward Italy. At a general meeting of Paris newspaper correspondents from different Latin countries Pirandello was greeted as "the greatest contemporary European playwright who is at this moment honoring Paris with his presence." The French Society of Authors invited him to become a member, extending to him all the privileges of French writers. This too was a unique distinction; it had never before been bestowed upon any foreign writer.

In 1931 Pirandello went to Portugal: articles of enthusiastic admiration filled the newspapers. He was named Honorary President of the International Congress of Critics, attended by representatives from all European and American nations. At the National Theatre, where the Congress held its sessions, Pirandello was greeted by unanimous applause. His *Sogno (ma forse no)* was produced in his honor in a Portuguese translation, and after the performance the President of Portugal conferred the highest Portuguese decoration upon him. He was treated with regal honors.

In 1932 he finished *Trovarsi* and *Quando si è qualcuno*.

In 1933 he left for a lecture tour of South America. There the famous Pirandello season of Buenos Aires was still vividly remembered, and he was greeted with enthusiasm.

In 1934 he wrote *Non si sa come* and he received the Nobel Prize.

In Stockholm, too, regal festivities awaited him, but he found it more and more difficult to overcome a certain sense of annoyance, impatient as he always was of honors bestowed upon him as an individual and not as an Italian.

Così è se vi pare was included in the repertoire of the Comédie Française and *Non si sa come* had its world *première* at Prague in December, 1934. In spite of his regret at having to continue to seek glory and fame abroad and in spite of the hurt he felt at the lack of recognition he received at home, even on the occasion of his winning the Nobel Prize, Pirandello never stopped giving of himself unstintingly. At the Academy he presided at a Literature Meeting and his first and only thought was, as always, the theatre.

He addressed the Meeting, which was attended by outstanding personalities from all over the world, as a writer, a poet, a technician, a director, a producer, an actor—through direct experience, he had come to know intimately the problems of all of them.

He was not afraid to say what he thought. On the contrary. Loudly and distinctly so that all might hear, he spoke of the separate functions of art and propaganda:

Since art belongs to the realm of disinterested feeling, all support which it is deemed worthy and deserving of should likewise be disinterested. One must choose between the objectives of art and those of propaganda: the two cannot be practiced together. If they are joined neither will be successful, for the realm of art is fancy, invention, imagination,

while the effectiveness of propaganda depends on precise and well-documented demonstrable facts. When art becomes the instrument of definite action and of practical utility, it is condemned and sacrificed.

From his vantage point Pirandello also called attention to the measures that must be taken to improve the situation of the theatre:

If it is true that the theatre will never die, it is equally true that it must be helped in its competition with other forms of entertainment—forms of entertainment which either have, as in the case of the lyric theatre, strong means of support, or else have, as in the case of sports and of the movies, momentary popular success. Everywhere new stadiums are being built; a film because of its possibility of mechanical reproduction can be performed many times a day.

Today, as in ancient times, in the spring and summer months, out in the open, in old amphitheatres, the people are called together to witness extraordinary and magnificent productions. But these productions do not solve the problem of the theatre in its other shape, the shape which it has come to have in every civilized country: the indoor theatre, where a play is given every evening. The problem of the theatre is a problem of civilization.

This problem, which the Master would have liked to see solved disinterestedly, for the benefit of Italy and for the sake of dramatic art itself, was never solved.

In the summer of 1935 the Master left for New York.

His return foreboded evil.

A few minutes before landing he became ill.

His strong constitution pulled him through.

But a year later, without warning, he again succumbed to illness.

We are led to think of his words: "Art can anticipate life: it can foretell what is to happen."

Did Pirandello unconsciously foretell his own death in this letter of October, 1935, from which we now quote?

I know that I can die from one moment to the next. But I do not feel ill. I feel alive. Alas, if it were not so! I could not accustom myself to a life which is only vegetation, inactivity. I would regard myself with disdain and disgust. I want Death to surprise me in the thick of activity, standing on my two feet. What else does the continuation of life mean? Why should I rest? Why should I take care of myself? For me, to live means to work, to create. When I shall no longer be able to do this, it will be a thousand times better to die. Let Death lie in wait for me wherever it wishes. I ask for one thing only, that it spring on me suddenly, without warning, and that it destroy me without throwing me down on my bed or stretching me out in an armchair, with a medicine dropper in one hand and a trembling glass in the other.

And in this letter too, on November 21, 1936, did Pirandello not express the wish of stepping back, away from life, at the approach of death?

All day long I have thought of all I should be doing. There is still so much to be done, so much, but it no longer seems to matter if I add to what I have done already or not. Mankind does not deserve anything, stubborn as it is in its constantly growing stupidity, in its brutal quarrelsomeness. Time is against me; mankind adverse. In the midst of tumultuousness and the ferocious desire for destruction there is no room for contemplation.

But is the Master really dead? Should we not rather repeat his own words from *Lazzaro*: "What can you know of death, if in God one does not die!"

THE MOUNTAIN GIANTS

CHARACTERS

The Countess's Theatrical Company

ILSE, still called THE COUNTESS

THE COUNT, her husband

DIAMANTE, the second lady of the company

CROMO, the dotard

SPIZZI, the young actor

BATTAGLIA, half man, half woman?

SACERDOTE

LUMACHI, with the dray

COTRONE, called THE MAGICIAN

The "Scalognati"

QUAQUEO, a dwarf

DUCCIO DOCCIA

LA SGRICIA

MILORDINO

MARA-MARA, with a small umbrella,

also called THE SCOTCH GIRL

DOLLS, PUPPETS, APPARITIONS, THE ANGEL (CENTUNO)
with its CENTURY.

The time and place are undetermined,
bordering between fable and reality.

ACT ONE

A villa, called La Scalogna, where Cotrone lives with his "Scalognati."

A tall cypress stands almost in the middle of the stage, which rises at this point; through old age, its trunk resembles a pole, but its upper part is made to look like a lantern brush.

The villa is of faded reddish plaster. To the right of the actor, one can see only the entrance with four steps leading up to it. These are set between two small, projecting, rounded balconies, with ashlar pier balustrades and with columns which support the domes. The door is old and still retains some evidence of old green paint. To the right and to the left there are two glass doors, rising level with the outside door and looking out over the balconies.

At one time seignorial, this villa now has fallen into ruin and is abandoned. Lonely in the valley, it is fronted by a small herby open space with a little bench to the left. One may approach it by a lane which slopes steeply down to the cypress, whence it continues to the left, going over a little bridge which straddles an unseen stream.

This little bridge must be well in sight to the left of the stage, and must be usable, having two parapets.

Beyond it are visible the wooded slopes of the mountain.

When the curtain rises it is almost evening. From within the villa, accompanied by strange instruments, one hears a leaping song. Now it bursts into shrill unexpected cries, and now it abandons itself loosely into risky glissades, until it is as if drawn into a whirl, from which suddenly it tears itself away

and flees like a frightened horse. This song must create the impression that a danger is about to be overcome, and that its end is longed for, so that everything may return to its proper place and become tranquil again. The mood is similar to those certain bad moments of frenzy which sometimes seize us, we know not why.

The translucence of the two glass windows of the balconies shows that the inside of the villa is lit up with strange, colored lights. Against them, LA SGRICIA, who is sitting calm and motionless on the balcony to the right of the big door, and DOCCIA and QUAQUEO, who are seated on the one to the left, are made to appear like mysterious visions. DOCCIA is leaning with his elbows on the small rail and is cupping his head in his hands; QUAQUEO is on the rail with his back flat against the wall. LA SGRICIA is a little old woman wearing a small bonnet clumsily tied under her chin, and a violet-colored cape over her shoulders. Her black-and-white checkered dress is all wrinkled. She is wearing cotton mittens. When she speaks, she is always slightly irritated, and her eyelids are constantly blinking over her restless, crafty eyes. From time to time, she runs a rapid finger under her wrinkled nose.

DUCCIO DOCCIA is small and of uncertain age. He is very bald and has grave, ovate eyes, and a thick lip which hangs over his long, pale, and bony face. His hands are long and soft, and his legs are bent, as if, even while walking, he were always looking for a place to sit.

QUAQUEO is a fat dwarf, clothed like a child, with red hair and with a chubby, broadly laughing terra-cotta face, but his eyes are malicious. There is a foolish grin on his lips.

As soon as the song from within the villa ends, MILORDINO, a young man about thirty who looks worn out, with a thin, sick-man's beard on his cheeks, a derby on his head, and a doublet green with age with which he is unwilling to part for

fear of losing his dignity, pokes his head out from behind the cypress and announces, in a frightened voice:

MILORDINO. Hey! People coming! People coming! Quick—the lightning, the thunder, and the green tongue. Put the green tongue on the roof!

LA SGRICIA (*getting up, opening the window, and calling inside the villa*). Help! Help! People coming! (*Leaning forward over the little balcony.*) Who, Milordino, what people?

QUAQUEO. In the night? If it were day, I'd believe it probably somebody who's lost. He'll go back, just wait.

MILORDINO. No! They're really coming forward! They're down here! And so many of them . . . more than ten!

QUAQUEO. Huh, if they're so many, they'll have courage. (*He leaps from the railing of the little balcony onto the steps in front of the door, and from there goes by the cypress to look on with MILORDINO.*)

LA SGRICIA (*screaming within*). The lightning! The lightning!

DOCCIA. Listen here—lightnings cost; go easy with them.

MILORDINO. They've got a cart too; they're pulling it by hand with one fellow between the poles and two behind!

DOCCIA. Probably people going to the mountain.

QUAQUEO. Oh no; they really look as if they were heading for us. Ooooh! They've got a woman on the cart! Look! Look! The cart's full of hay and the woman is lying on top of it!

MILORDINO. Let's get Mara-Mara on the bridge with her umbrella, at least.

(*Mara-Mara rushes on stage from the door of the villa, shouting.*)

MARA-MARA. Here I come, here I come. They'll be afraid of the Scotch lassie. (*Mara-Mara is a little woman. One may consider her inflated, as she is stuffed like a bale, wearing a very short skirt of Scotch-checkered material which is draped over*

the bulges of the stuffing. Her legs are bare, with woolen stockings folded over at the calves. A small, green oilcloth hat with straight brim sits on her head, with a chicken feather to one side. She has a little parasol in her hand, a haversack and a flask slung over her shoulder.) Hey, up there, give me some light from the roof! You think I want to break my neck?

LA SGRICIA (*to the two men who are looking on*). Have they stopped? Are they going back?

QUAQUEO. Call Cotrone!

DOCCIA. Cotrone! Cotrone!

LA SGRICIA. He's got the gout!

(*LA SGRICIA as well as DUCCIO have come down from the balconies and are now in front of the villa, on the herby open space. They are dismayed. COTRONE appears, coming from the door. He is a huge, bearded man with a lovely and sincere face, serene and sparkling big eyes, a youthful mouth in which his shiny teeth sparkle through the warm blond color of his unkempt mustaches and beard. His feet are a bit soft. He is casually dressed, wearing a long black tunic and wide, light-colored trousers. On his head he has an old Turkish fez, and he wears an azure shirt slightly open over his chest.*)

COTRONE. What's wrong? Lord, are you not ashamed! You are afraid yourselves, and you want to scare others—

MILORDINO. They're coming up in a gang! They're more than ten.

QUAQUEO. No, they're eight; I counted them . . . including the woman.

COTRONE. Oh, well, wonderful! You say there is also a woman? Probably a dethroned queen. Is she nude?

QUAQUEO (*astounded*). Nude? No, she didn't seem to be nude.

COTRONE. Yes, nude, silly! A nude woman on a hay-cart, with

her breasts aloft and her red hair flowing like the blood in a tragedy! Her outlawed ministers are pulling her, and they are in shirt sleeves, to sweat less. Come, wake up, a bit of imagination! I hope you are not getting reasonable on me! Remember that no dangers exist for us, and he who reasons is a coward. By Jove, now that evening approaches—that's when we reign!

MILORDINO. That's all fine and well, but what if they believe in nothing?

COTRONE. Must you have others believe you in order to believe yourself?

LA SGRICIA. Are they still coming up?

MILORDINO. The lightnings don't stop them . . . nor does Mara-Mara!

DOCCLA. Well, if they're of no use, we're wasting them. Turn them off.

COTRONE. That's right, turn off the lights up there! Enough of those lightnings. Mara-Mara, you come down here! If they are not frightened, it means they must be of our class, and we'll understand one another easily enough. The villa is spacious. (*Struck by an idea.*) Oh . . . wait a minute . . . (*To QUAQUEO.*) You said they are eight?

QUAQUEO. Eight, that's right; that is . . . it seemed to me . . .

DOCCLA. Of course, you counted them, didn't you? What nonsense!

QUAQUEO. O.K., O.K., I said eight.

COTRONE. Then they are few.

QUAQUEO. Eight and a cart; you think that's few?

COTRONE. Unless the others are disbanded.

LA SGRICIA. Brigands?

COTRONE. Of course not. What do you mean, brigands! Hush. When you're crazy, all is possible. Perhaps it is those people.

DOCCLA. What people?

QUAQUEO. Here they are!

(When the lightnings and the reflector which lit up Mara-Mara on the parapet of the little bridge were shut off, the stage was left in a thin, crepuscular light which gradually became the pallor cast by the first moonbeams of evening.)

The COUNT, DIAMANTE, CROMO, and BATTAGLIA (a generic actor who doubles also as a woman), who form part of the Countess's troupe, appear from the path behind the cypress.

The COUNT is a pale young blond; he looks lost and very tired. He is in a full-dress suit, chick-pea-colored with wear, even torn here and there, with a white waistcoat and an old straw hat. Though he is extremely poor by now, as his attire indicates, he retains nevertheless the slight boredom of great nobility.

DIAMANTE is in her very late thirties. Over her shapely, though rather exaggerated, bosom, her hard head is firmly anchored yet there is a kind of swaggering. Its lines are violent. Her face is highlighted by tragic eyebrows which form over deep, serious eyes, which, in turn, are parted by her dictatorial and haughty nose. She has two dimples of pitch-black hair at the very corners of her mouth, and several other metallic whiskers curl up on her chin. She always seems to be on the point of bursting with protective charity for the poor, unfortunate young COUNT, and with indignation toward ILSE, his wife, whose victim she holds the COUNT to be.

CROMO is very strangely bald, both frontally and occipitally, because whatever is left of his carrot-colored hair seems to form two triangles whose upper corners meet directly on top of his head. He is pale and freckled; his eyes are light green. When he speaks, his voice is sepulchral, and from his tone and gestures one notices his readiness to become vexed at the very slightest provocation.

BATTAGLIA, though a man, has an equine face like a vicious old maid and all the lackadaisicalness of a sickly monkey. He plays the parts of both men and women (that is, with wigs),

and even that of the prompter. But he has gentle, entreating eyes which peer through the signs of vice on his face.)

CROMO. Oh, thank you, my good friends. That was really well done. We are dead tired!

DOCCIA (*stunned*). Thank you? For what?

CROMO. What do you mean, for what? Why, for the signals you gave us to let us know we had finally reached our goal.

COTRONE. Ah, ah; that's it! It is they!

BATTAGLIA (*indicating Mara*). Boy, what courage! I envy you, Madam.

CROMO. That's right! On the parapet of that bridge . . . You were terrific . . . and with that little umbrella!

DIAMANTE. Those lightnings were beautiful! And that green fire on the roof!

QUAQUEO. Well, what do you know! They mistook it for a theater. Here we are supposed to be ghosts—

MILORDINO. —And they had a lot of fun!

DIAMANTE. Ghosts? What ghosts?

QUAQUEO. Yes, ghosts, apparitions, to scare people and keep them away.

COTRONE. Hold your tongue! (*To CROMO.*) Are you the Countess's Troupe? I thought so . . .

CROMO. Here we are!

DOCCIA. The Troupe?

BATTAGLIA. The last remnants—

DIAMANTE. That isn't so! You mean the pillars. Thank God we're the pillars. And to begin with, the Count, here. (*She takes him by the hand with one hand, and places the other under his shoulder, as if he were a child.*) Come, come forward.

COTRONE (*stretching out his hand*). You are welcome here, Count.

CROMO (*declaiming*). But without credit and without cash!

DIAMANTE (*indignant*). Good Lord, when will you stop lacking respect for yourselves by humiliating—

COUNT (*annoyed*). Oh, no, my dear, they are not humiliating me . . .

CROMO. All right, let's say Count, but remember that, in the fix we're in, it's best to tone things down.

BATTAGLIA. —And when I said "last remnants," I was talking about myself. . . .

CROMO (*to quiet him*). You're modest, we know it.

BATTAGLIA. No, I should rather say rambling, with weariness and hunger.

COTRONE. But here you will find a place to rest and . . . yes, I think a snack to quench your hunger too.

LA SGRICIA (*quick, cold, and sharp*). All the fire is out in the kitchen.

MARA-MARA. As far as that goes, we can kindle it again, but how about telling us—

DOCCIA. —That's right, who these people are—

COTRONE. Yes, right away. (*To the COUNT.*) But what about the Countess?

COUNT. She's here, but she's so tired too. . . .

BATTAGLIA. She can hardly stand up any longer.

QUAQUEO. The lady on the cart? A Countess? (*Flattening out her hands palms upward and lifting up a foot.*) I get it! You arranged a play for us to surprise us!

COTRONE. Because they too belong to our family, more or less. You'll see what I mean. (*To the COUNT.*) Does the Countess need any help?

DIAMANTE. She could make an effort to make the hill on her own two feet!

COUNT (*shouts at her immediately, angrily and sharply*). She certainly can't!

CROMO. Lumachi is gathering his strength—

BATTAGLIA. —The last of his strength . . .

CROMO. —For this last fling.

COTRONE (*eagerly*). But I can lend you a hand too. . . .

COUNT. No, there are two more fellows down there with Lumachi. I should rather you told us something. (*He looks about him, as if lost.*) I see that we are in a valley here, near the wooded slopes of a mountain. . . .

CROMO. And where can the hotels be?

BATTAGLIA. And the chophouses?

DIAMANTE. And the theater where we're going to put on our play?

COTRONE. Hold on. If you give me a chance to talk, I shall explain things to your folks as well as to mine. We are all mistaken, my friends, but we must not be confused over so little.

(*At this point, from the interior the voices of SPIZZI, SACERDOTE, and LUMACHI are heard. They are pushing the hay-cart on which the COUNTESS is lying.*)

VOICES. —Hip, let's go! Just a little more!

—We're herel

—Easy! Hey, hold it! Don't push too much!

(*Everybody turns to look at them. The cart appears.*)

CROMO. Here's the Countess!

COUNT. Look out for the cypress! Watch out, there!

(*He runs up to help, with COTRONE. When LUMACHI has guided the cart to the open space, he lowers the props which are beside the poles, so that the cart stands up on them and on the two wheels, without the help of other supports. Then he gets out of the way. All the others look dismayed at the COUNTESS, who is reclining on the greenish hay with her copper-colored hair disheveled. Her dress is humble, pitiable and a bit worn; it is made of bluish-purple veil with a low neckline, and with long and abundant sleeves which leave her arms uncovered as they slide easily upward.*)

MILORDINO. Good God, is she pale!

MARA-MARA. Looks like she's dead. . . .

SPIZZI. Quiet!

ILSE (*after a moment, she rises to a sitting position on the cart and speaks with profound emotion*).

If you wish to lend an ear

To this new tale of mine,

Believe ye in this,

This wretched woman's dress;

But believe ye much more

In these mother's sighs,

Because of ill-fortune,

Because of ill-fortune—

(*At this point, as if reacting to an established signal, the COUNT, CROMO, and all the other members of the Countess's Troupe burst out in a chorus of varied laughters, all of which indicate unbelief. They cease at once simultaneously, and ILSE continues.*)

So laugh they all,

The learned folk

Who yet do see

That I weep,

And dwell undisturbed . . .

COTRONE (*coming out of his amazement*). Oh, I see; you are reciting!

MILORDINO. Well, of all things!

MARA-MARA. They're reciting!

SACERDOTE. Hush! When she gets started, we must second her!

ILSE (*continuing*). . . Indeed, they are annoyed,

So they yell in my face:

"Blockhead! Blockhead!"

For they deem it impossible

That my own son,
 That my own creature . . .
 But you, you must believe me;
 I bring you the witnesses;
 They are all poor women,
 Poor mothers like me,
 From my own surroundings;
 One knows the other,
 And we all know it is true . . .

(She waves her hand, as if to call someone.)

COUNT *(bending over her, sweetly)*. No, stop it, my dear—
 ILSE *(impatiently, and waving her hands)*. The women . . .
 the women . . .

COUNT. But don't you see? The women are not here for the moment.

ILSE *(as if awakening)*. They are not here? Why not? Where have you brought me?

COUNT. We have arrived. . . . We'll get some information now. . . .

MILORDINO. She sure was reciting well!

LA SGRICIA. That's too bad; I really liked it . . .

DOCCIA. Just hearing them laugh all together . . .

QUAQUEO *(to COTRONE)*. So I suppose you think it's right!

COTRONE. Of course, it's right. They *are* reciting. What else do you expect them to do? They're show people.

COUNT. For Heaven's sake, don't say that in front of my wife!

ILSE *(coming down off the dray, with several strands of hay in her hair)*. And why shouldn't he say it? No, go ahead, say it! I like it!

COTRONE. I beg your pardon, Madam, I had no intention of offending . . .

ILSE *(speaking as if in a delirium)*. Yes, show people, real show people. *(She points at her husband.)* Not he, but I am.

. . . It's in my blood, it's in my birth! . . . And he too falls with me now.

COUNT (*trying to interrupt her*). Oh no, good Lord, what are you saying?

ILSE. Yes, he falls with me, from his marble palaces into wooden shacks! On public squares too, even on squares! Where are we here? Lumachi, where are you? Lumachi? Try blowing your trumpet! Let's see if we can gather some people around! (*She looks around, full of horror and lost in her delirium.*) Oh, God, where are we here? Where are we? (*She shelters herself against SPIZZI's chest; he has come next to her.*)

COTRONE. You have nothing to fear, Countess, among friends.

CROMO. She has fever; she's delirious.

QUAQUEO. But is she an honest-to-goodness Countess?

COUNT. A Countess: she is my wife!

COTRONE. Be quiet, Quaqueo!

MARA-MARA. But if you don't tell us . . .

DOCCIA. They look crazy to us!

COUNT (*to COTRONE*). We were sent to you. . . .

COTRONE. That's right, Count. I beg you to excuse them: I forgot to inform them; and I used that word because of them. But I am well aware that—

SPIZZI (*hardly twenty, pale, with glowing eyes, blond hair which probably was once dyed and is now discolored, a mouth like a rosebud but slightly injured by a rather obstructing, overhanging nose. He is woefully elegant in his faded sport outfit. He has knee-length trousers and thick woolen socks. He interrupts*). You're aware of nothing; you can't be aware of the heroic martyrdom of this lady!

ILSE (*resentfully and impetuously, backing away from him*). I forbid you to talk about it, Spizzil! (*Then, trembling with disdain and leaning against CROMO.*) If only I had not been born an actress, you understand? My great shame is that you had to be the first to believe it and to make others believe it too. . . .

"Want a good contract?—Sell yourself!" "Clothes, jewels?—Sell yourself!" Even for a filthy little praise in a newspaper!

CROMO (*stunned*). What are you talking about? Why are you turning to me?

ILSE. Because you're the one who said it!

CROMO. I said it? When? What did I say?

COUNT (*beseeking his wife*). Don't disparage yourself talking about such things—you, of all people—it's horrible!

ILSE. No, my dear; on the contrary, it is good to talk about them, now that we have reached the last lap! When things get so bad for us, mere shadows of what we were—(*Momentarily to COTRONE, and then to all the rest*). You know, we all sleep together . . . in stables—

COUNT. That is not true.

ILSE. What do you mean, it isn't true? Why, yesterday—

COUNT. But that was not a stable, my dear. You slept on a bench in a railroad station.

CROMO. A third-class waiting room.

ILSE (*to COTRONE, continuing*). When you stretch and when you turn over, some words slip out . . . you say things . . . (*To CROMO.*) Just because you can't see in the dark, do you think I can't even hear? I heard you!

CROMO. What did you hear?

ILSE. I heard something, all right, while I was tangling with those . . . I don't know what they were . . . probably spider webs . . .

COUNT. Good grief, no, Ilse; that couldn't be.

ILSE. . . . Well then, they were drifts of darkness which fluttered coldly in my face while I was feverish. . . . Yes, 'tis true . . . with their breath . . . (*To CROMO.*) As soon as I heard you . . . I laughed like this:—ihihih, ihihih—but it made me shiver and I clenched my teeth. I tightened up so that I wouldn't start yelping like a drubbed dog. . . . (*Very briskly and again to CROMO.*) Didn't you even hear that laughter?

CROMO. Not I—

ILSE. Yes, you did. You thought it was someone else's, in the dark . . . someone else's who agreed. You didn't think that it could have been I . . .

CROMO. I don't remember a thing!

ILSE. I remember everything!

SPIZZI. So, what was it he said?

ILSE. That it would have been much better, in order not to suffer this heroic martyrdom, as you put it, and in order not to let all of you suffer it too—oh, how much better it would have been—he said . . .

CROMO (*understanding what she means and protesting*). Oh, now I know what you mean! But this is something we all said, not only I; and whoever didn't say so thought it. I'll bet you he did too! (*Indicates the COUNT.*)

COUNT. I? What are you getting at?

ILSE. That I, my dearest (*putting her hands around his head*)—here, on this noble forehead—(*turning toward CROMO*) without giving it another thought, huh? That's just what you said.

CROMO. —That's right, without giving it another thought, and by now all of us would not be starving!

ILSE. . . . I should have made you a grand cuckold . . . (*She is about to fork her fingers over his forehead, but is seized by an uncontrolled feeling of indignation and disgust.*) Ah!

(*And suddenly interrupting her loathsome gesture, she converts it into an echoing, backhand slap on CROMO's cheek; she totters and falls to the ground, violently and convulsively laughing and crying. CROMO takes shelter, stunned as he is and with his cheek inflamed. All are surprised by that unexpected gesture and begin talking simultaneously; some comment, others rush to assist. Four groups form: the first rescues the Countess: the COUNT, DIAMANTE, and COTRONE; the second: QUAQUEO, DOCCIA, MARA-MARA, and MILORDINO; the third:*

SACERDOTE, LUMACHI, BATTAGLIA, and LA SGRICIA; *the fourth: SPIZZI and CROMO. The four groups deliver the following four assigned sections at the same time:*)

COUNT. Good God, she's going crazy! Ilse, Ilse, for Heaven's sake! We can't go on like this!

DIAMANTE. Take it easy, take it easy, Ilse! Do it for your husband's sake, at least!

COTRONE. Countess . . . Countess. Come on, let's take her over there; she'll feel better—

ILSE. No, let me go, let me go! I want everybody to understand.

• • •

QUAQUEO. What a whale of a performance! And then she says no!

DOCCIA. She's good, and she sure takes a short-cut!

MARA-MARA. Did she ever land a backhand!

MILORDINO. Where the deuce did they escape from?

• • •

BATTAGLIA. If we dig deep enough, we'll dig our own grave. . . .

LUMACHI. It seems impossible that one could become so violent over nothing!

SACERDOTE. She's right, though; we all said it!

LA SGRICIA (*making the sign of the cross*). This is like being in the jungle!

• • •

SPIZZI (*to CROMO, coming right up against him*). You coward, you! You dared—

CROMO (*pushing him back*). Get out of the way! Enough of this monkey business!

SPIZZI. "Without giving it another thought," eh, to save our skins. . . . You would have sold your wife!

CROMO. What skins, you jackass! I said it for the one who killed himself . . .

• • •

COUNTESS (*breaking away from those who want to hold her back, and stepping forward*). You all said it?

SPIZZI. Of course not! It isn't true!

DIAMANTE. I didn't say a thing.

BATTAGLIA. I didn't either.

ILSE (*to her husband*). Is it true that you thought it too?

COUNT. Why no, Ilse! You're raving. In front of people who do not know us . . .

COTRONE. Ah, if it's a question of that, Count . . .

ILSE. It is, you see, just because of that! At this point! . . .

COTRONE. Don't worry about us, Countess. We are vacationers, and open-hearted.

ILSE. Countess? I am an actress—and I had to remind him (*refers to CROMO*) that it is an honor—and remind him he is an actor too, like the others.

CROMO. And I certainly don't boast about it! Nor have you any reason to boast about it in front of me—do you hear?—because I have always been an actor, and I've acted honorably and I've followed you all the way over here. But I wouldn't forget, if I were you, that at one time you wanted to give up being an actress!

COUNT. That is not so! I was the one who forced her to withdraw from the stage.

CROMO. And you did mighty well, my friend! It should have lasted that way—you a Count, and I a wretch—that way, we couldn't be chums now! (*To the COUNTESS.*) You had married a Count—(*to the others, as if parenthetically*) he was rich! (*Again to the COUNTESS.*) You were not an actress any more, chaste the way you had proudly been able to keep yourself. (I know, I know; I knew that this is what you wanted to say.)

ILSE. That's exactly it.

CROMO. But, my dear, you were too anxious to boast about your chastity! By that time, you were a Countess! Good Heavens! As a Countess, you could have made him a cuckold! Countesses are more generous; they do those things. That ill-fated man of yours would not have killed himself; and you yourself, along with him, poor man, and all of us . . . we wouldn't be in this fix now!

ILSE (*holding herself erect, rigid, almost hardened, in a convulsion which seems to rise from her stomach; she is startled. She takes to laughing again, as she claimed already to have laughed before*). Ihihih, ihihih, ihihihihihih. . . . (*She lifts her hands, and with her two index fingers she forms an excessive two-pronged fork, while speaking convulsively in a rasping voice.*) On butterflies they are called antennae . . .

COUNT (*checking his anger and getting face to face with CROMO*). Go away! Get out of here! You cannot stay with us any longer!

CROMO. Go away? And where the dickens do you want me to go now? What are you going to pay me with?

ILSE (*quickly to her husband*). He's right; what are you going to pay him with? Do you hear that? (*Then, turning to COTRONE.*) That is the whole story, sir; we cannot make enough to pay salaries any more.

SPIZZI. Oh, no, Ilse! You can't say that about us!

ILSE. I am talking about him! I don't mean you.

CROMO. That isn't so! You can't say that about me either! Pay? If that were the case, I would have left long ago, like the others. But I'm still around, because I appreciate you. I'm only talking because it makes me mad to see you still—

ILSE (*desperately*). What more do you want me to do?

CROMO. Huh. Too late now! But before, you could have done something! Before that man killed himself and became for you and for all of us a kind of cancer that has worn us to the very bone. Just look at us: filthy, hungry, stray dogs, kicked

out by everybody . . . and you there—your chin is up but your wings are clipped; you're like a little bird hanging, the kind they sell in bunches, tied together through the holes in their bills . . .

QUAQUEO. Who did kill himself?

(*The question is lost in the commotion that CROMO's words have produced among his friends. No one answers.*)

LA SGRICIA. Was it one of them?

ILSE (*noticing her and suddenly sympathetic with her*). No, my dear old lady. None of them. He was one who was one too many among people. He was a poet.

COTRONE. Oh, no, Madam; forgive me, but a poet he was not!

SPIZZI. The Countess is referring to the author of *The Tale of the Changed Son*, which we have been going around performing for two years.

COTRONE. Precisely, I guessed it . . .

SPIZZI. And you dare say that he was not a poet?

COTRONE. If he was, he certainly didn't kill himself because of that!

CROMO. He killed himself because he loved her! (*He designates the COUNTESS.*)

COTRONE. Ah, so that's it . . . and because the lady here, I suppose, was faithful to her husband and did not want to answer his love. Poetry is out of the question. A poet writes poems: he does not kill himself.

ILSE (*indicating CROMO*). Didn't you hear—he says that I should have answered his love. A Countess now! As if such nobility came from a title—

COUNT. —And not from the heart!

CROMO. Oh, don't be silly! What do you know about it! She loved him herself!

ILSE. I?

CROMO. Yes, you! you too! And this is to your credit, in my way of thinking! Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to figure it

out. And this man here (*points at the COUNT*) is now paying for the sacrifice you made in not yielding! As a matter of fact, you know one should never oppose one's heart's desires!

COUNT. In Heaven's name, are you ever going to stop this broadcasting?

CROMO. Since we're talking about . . . I didn't start it.

COUNT. You certainly did start it!

QUAQUEO. So much so that you earned yourself a nice slap!

(This remark creates general laughter.)

ILSE. That's right, my dear—a slap (*advancing toward CROMO and patting his cheek*) which we may now erase this way. . . . You are not my enemy, even if you do expose me.

CROMO. But I don't!

ILSE. Yes, and you knife me, right in front of onlookers.

CROMO. I knife you?

ILSE. Well, what else would you call it? . . . (*Turning to COTRONE.*) But that's natural . . . when we've landed out on the street. . . . (*To the COUNT.*) Poor darling, you would still like to retain your dignity. . . . Don't worry, it will end. I feel it coming. . . . It won't be long now—

COUNT. Oh, no, Ilse! All you need is a little rest. . . .

ILSE. What do you hope to hide any more? And where? If you haven't sinned, you may disclose your soul as a child unclothed or in shreds. I even feel my sleep torn in shreds from my eyes. . . . (*She looks about her, and looks to the rear.*) Why, we are out in the country . . . good Lord . . . and it's dark . . . and all these people here . . . (*To her husband.*) I loved him, you understand? And I made him die. This may well be said, my dear, about a dead man who received nothing from me. (*She approaches COTRONE.*) Sir, it's almost like a dream, or like another life after death . . . This sea which we have crossed . . . My name was then Ilse Paulsen . . .

COTRONE. I know, Countess—

ILSE. I had left a good name in the theatre—

COUNT (*looking askance at CROMO*). A pure name!
 CROMO (*erupting*). Who the devil ever denied it! She has always been strange and over-excited! Before marrying him, she wanted to become a nun. . . . Figure that one out!

SPIZZI. Oh, so you know it. And you claim that, once she got to be a Countess—

CROMO. But I've already told you why I said that!

ILSE. It was a sacred duty for me! (*Again to COTRONE*.) A young friend of his (*designating her husband*), a poet, came to read a work that he was writing—he said for me—but he really had no hope, because I had left the stage. The work struck me as being so beautiful that (*turning toward CROMO*)—yes, that's right, I got excited over it immediately. (*Again to COTRONE*.) But I understood what he was driving at. (It doesn't take long for a woman to notice these things—when someone has an idea about her, I mean.) He wanted to lure me back to my former life with his tempting play. But it was not for the sake of the work; it was for himself, to make me his . . . I felt that if I disappointed him right away, he would never have finished the work. And because it was so beautiful, not only did I not disappoint him, but I actually nourished his illusion till the very end. When the work was finished, I withdrew from that fire, though I was already burning of it. How can you not understand it, seeing me in this pitiful condition? He is right: (*She designates CROMO*.) I could never free myself from it. The life which I denied him, I had to devote to his work. And he himself understood it (*designating her husband*) and consented that I return to the stage in order to fulfill this sacred duty of mine. For this play alone!

CROMO. Consecration and martyrdom! Because he (*designating the COUNT*) was never jealous of him, not even afterward.

COUNT. I had no reason to be!

CROMO. But don't you understand that he is not dead for her?

She wants him to live! Here she is in shreds like a beggar; she is dying and she is causing all of us to die of it just so he, the author, may still live!

DIAMANTE. He's jealous of him, that's what!

CROMO. Good girl, now you guessed it!

DIAMANTE. Aw, you people are all in love with her!

CROMO. That's not love; that's spite and compassion!

ILSE (*speaking at the same time as SPIZZI*). He would like to disgrace me, yet he praises me more!

SPIZZI. It's his knack for being wicked, even if he isn't.

BATTAGLIA (*also at the same time*). Great Scott! I feel all upset . . .

LUMACHI (*at the same time, folding his arms*). Well, I ask you, what kind of a situation is this we're in?

ILSE (*to CROMO*). Of course I'm dying of it! I accepted it, like an inheritance. Though I must say that at first it didn't seem to me that he and his work should cause me all this grief—the grief which was in him and which I found . . .

COTRONE. So, because the author was a poet, this work, among the masses, has been your ruin? Ah, how well I understand! How well I understand!

BATTAGLIA. Ever since the first performance—

COTRONE. No one would hear of it?

SACERDOTE. Everybody was against it!

CROMO. They booed so much the walls were shaking!

COTRONE. Is that so? Really?

ILSE. Are you amused over it?

COTRONE. No, Countess, it's because I understand it well. The work of a poet—

DIAMANTE. Wasn't worth a cent! They didn't even appreciate the amazing new scenery. The dogs!

BATTAGLIA (*with his usual sigh*). And the lighting! Boy, what lighting!

CROMO. All the marvels of a spectacular staging! There were forty-two of us, including the supernumeraries. . . .

COTRONE. And just the handful of you are left?

CROMO (*showing his suit*). . . . And like this! The work of a poet—

COUNT (*with bitter anger*). You too!

CROMO (*indicating the COUNT*). And a whole fortune gone with the wind!

COUNT. I am not sorry about it! I asked for it!

ILSE. That's very fine! That is worthy of you!

COUNT. No, really; I am not the type to be odd and over-excited. I firmly believed in the work. . . .

COTRONE. Well, you know, I didn't mention the phrase "work of a poet" to anger you; quite to the contrary, I did so to show my contempt for those who turned against you!

COUNT. To degrade the work is the same for me as to degrade her. (*He indicates his wife.*) To degrade all that her efforts are worth to me! I paid for it with all my fortune, and I don't care and I don't feel sorry for myself! Just so she stays on top . . . and I hope this condition I have wound up in will be redeemed by the beauty and greatness of the work; or else . . . or else, all the contempt of the people . . . you know what I mean . . . and the laughing . . . (*He stops as if choked by his own emotion.*)

COTRONE. But I despise those people, Count! That's why I am living here. Just to prove it, take a look at this . . . (*He shows his fez, which he has been holding in his hands since the arrival of the guests; he puts it on.*) I was once a Christian, now I'm a Turk!

LA SCRICIA. Here, here, leave religion out of this!

COTRONE. Why no, my dear, this has nothing to do with Mohammed! I'm a Turk due to the failure of the poetry of Christianity. But has the hostility really been so great?

COUNT. No, that's not so; we even found some friends here and there . . .

SPIZZI. . . . Full of zeal . . .

DIAMANTE (*gloomily*). . . . But few of them!

CROMO. . . . And the sponsors cancelled our contracts and the theaters in the large cities were denied us with the excuse that our company was on the way out, without props or costumes.

COUNT. That's not true! We still have with us as much as we need for the show!

BATTAGLIA. The costumes are over there in the bags—

LUMACHI. Under the hay . . .

SPIZZI. And besides, they're not necessary!

CROMO. What about the scenery?

COUNT. So far, we have always made out!

BATTAGLIA. The roles are changeable; I act the part of both a man and a woman—

CROMO. You do that even when you're not acting!

BATTAGLIA (*with an effeminate hand gesture*). Devil!

SACERDOTE. All in all, we can do everything!

DIAMANTE. And we don't skip a thing! Whatever we can't act out, we read.

SPIZZI. The work is so beautiful that no one cares about the actors or the missing props!

COUNT (*To Cotrone*). But there is nothing missing. Don't believe them, there's nothing missing, I tell you. It's that same old tendency to humble ourselves, that's all it is!

COTRONE. I admire your spirit, Count. But believe me, with me you don't have to extol the beauty of the work or the goodness of the show. You were sent to me by a distant friend of mine who probably tried too late or couldn't find a way to inform you of the advice I had given him, which was to prevent you from venturing all the way out here.

COUNT. Oh, really? Why so?

SPIZZI. Is there nothing to do out here?

CROMO. What did I tell you?!

LUMACHI. Eh, I thought so! Up in the mountains!

COTRONE. Be patient, please; don't be discouraged; we'll figure something out!

DIAMANTE. But where do you expect to go? You know there isn't a blessed thing here?

COTRONE. Certainly not in town; and if you left your belongings there, you had better remove them.

COUNT. But isn't there a theater in town?

COTRONE. Yes, Count, there is one, but it belongs to the mice. It's always locked. Even if it were open, no one would go there.

QUAQUEO. They're talking about tearing it down. . . .

COTRONE. So they are, to build a little stadium . . .

QUAQUEO. For racing and for fights. . . .

MARA-MARA. No, I heard they wanted to make it into a movie-house.

COTRONE. Don't even think about that place!

COUNT. Where can we go then? There is no population near your place here. . . .

DIAMANTE. What a confounded place to land in!

SPIZZI. They recommended us to you—

COTRONE. And I am here and at your service with my friends. Don't get confused. We'll look around, we'll investigate, and we'll find something. In the meantime, why don't you go inside the villa? . . . You must be tired. We shall try to make you as comfortable as we can tonight. The villa is large.

BATTAGLIA. . . . How about a bite to eat?

COTRONE. You had better try to follow our example out here.

BATTAGLIA. What does that mean?

DOCCIA. To do without everything and not need anything.

QUAQUEO. Don't scare them away!

BATTAGLIA. And when you need everything?

COTRONE. Come in! Come in!

BATTAGLIA. How can you get along without anything?

COTRONE. Countess . . . (*ILSE, alone on the little bench, nods negatively.*) Won't you come in?

QUAQUEO (*to DOCCIA*). Did you see that? She doesn't want to go in.

COUNT. Yes, she will be in later. (*To COTRONE*). Go and take care of the others, if you wish.

DIAMANTE. But do you think we should accept?

CROMO. Well, this way, at least, we've got a roof over our heads. I don't suppose you'd care to stay out in the damp all night!

BATTAGLIA. But we've got to have something to eat!

COTRONE. Of course, of course! We'll find something. Look into that, will you, Mara-Mara?

MARA-MARA. Sure thing. Come on in!

LUMACHI. We certainly cannot backtrack all the way to town again. It's true I've got a cart, but the catch is that I pull it myself!

SACERDOTE (*to BATTAGLIA, who is on his way toward the villa*). If you don't eat so much, you'll sleep better.

BATTAGLIA. Theoretically, yes! But then, my friend, your insides get restless, your stomach yells bloody murder, and you can't sleep!

COTRONE (*to LUMACHI*). You can leave the cart outside. (*To DOCCIA*). Duccio, you take charge of assigning quarters.

SPIZZI. For the Countess!

CROMO. But there will be enough for everybody, I hope!

MILORDINO. For everybody! We've got more rooms than we need.

LA SGRICIA. (*to COTRONE*). Hey, nobody gets mine, I warn you! I'm not giving mine up to anybody!

COTRONE. Yes, yes, we know, don't worry about it. The organ is in it; that's our church.

QUAQUEO (*amused, pushing the party onward*). Come on, let's go, let's go! We'll have lots of fun! I'll be a little boy who dances like a cat on the organ keyboard!

(*All enter the villa, except ILSE, the COUNT, and COTRONE.*)

ACT TWO

The last glimmers of dusk fade, and the light dims on the stage. Now the first moonbeams gradually appear. COTRONE waits until all the others have entered the villa; then, after a short silence, he continues to speak, in a calmer tone.

COTRONE. For the Countess, the room of the former masters of the villa is still intact; it's the only one left with a key, and I have it.

ILSE (*still seated, remains silent and absorbed. Then she begins to recite with an almost distant voice*).

Gathered around her and all quite ready
By a she-cat five males lie poised,
And though in wait, all are anguished
To see her in such spasms and sighs;
But lo! the first of them to move
By all of the rest is assailed:
They fray and they fight and they bite
And they flee and they follow. . .

COTRONE (*whispering to the COUNT*). Is she going over her part?

COUNT (*whispering to COTRONE*). No, it isn't hers.

(*Then he goes on in a kind of spiteful voice.*) "Well . . . well . . . well . . ."

ILSE. Are she-cats then the ones
To play such games on children?
Behold! I ask you to behold!

COUNT. "What am I to behold?"

ILSE. Behold this lock
Of braided hair.

(*Then suddenly with another tone of voice, that of a mother*

who shelters the head of her child tightly against her bosom.)

No, my most precious son!

(Continuing in her original tone of voice.)

Do you see?

Woe if the comb

Should touch it;

Or the scissors cut it;

The child would die . . .

COTRONE. The Countess has an enchanting voice. . . . I think that she would feel better immediately, if she would go into the villa for a while.

COUNT. Comè Ilse, my dear, at least you will rest a while.

COTRONE. I suppose we lack the necessary things, but the superfluous ones we have in real abundance. . . . Wait and see. Even outside. Take the wall of this façade, for instance. All I have to do is shout once—*(He cups his hands about his mouth and shouts.)* Ho, therel! *(At his shout, the façade of the villa is immediately illuminated by a fantastic light of dawn.)* And the walls exude light!

ILSE. *(astounded, like a little girl).* Oh, how beautiful!

COUNT. How did you do it?

COTRONE. They call me Cotrone the Magician. I live modestly on these enchantments. I create them. And now, wait and see. *(He again puts his hands up to his mouth and shouts.)* Black! *(The thin moonbeams of before reappear, once the façade light is extinguished.)* It seems that the night creates this blackness for the fireflies, which reveal for a moment their faint greenish flash. Well, then, look—there—there—there . . .

(As soon as he speaks and points with his finger in three different directions, three green apparitions are visible where he has pointed. They are visible for a moment, way down by the base of the mountain, like fleeting phantasms.)

ILSE. Oh, good Lord, how is that?

COUNT. What are they?

COTRONE. Fireflies! Mine. A magician's. We are here as if on the very border of life, Countess. At a command, these borders become detached and the invisible enters; the ghosts evaporate. It's natural. It happens frequently in our dreams. I make it happen even in our waking; that's all. Dreams, music, prayer, love . . . all the infinite which is in man, you will find in and about this villa.

(*At this point, LA SGRICIA appears on the threshold, irritated.*)

LA SGRICIA. Cotrone, you'll find out that the Angel One Hundred will not want to visit us any more, I warn you!

COTRONE. Oh, of course he will come, Sgricia. Don't be afraid. Come closer . . .

LA SGRICIA (*getting closer*). Not if all those devils in there keep on the way they're talking!

COTRONE. But don't you know that you should not be afraid of words? (*Introducing her.*) Here is the one who prays for us all. La Sgricia of the Angel One Hundred. She came here to live with us when the Church would not admit the miracle which the Angel called One Hundred performed on her.

ILSE. One hundred?

COTRONE. Yes, because he has one hundred souls of Purgatory under his custody and he leads them every night in holy enterprises.

ILSE. Oh, really? And what is the miracle?

COTRONE. (*to LA SGRICIA*). Come, Sgricia, tell the Countess the story!

LA SGRICIA (*sullenly*). You won't believe it.

ILSE. Why yes, of course I'll believe it.

COTRONE. No one can be more willing to believe it than the Countess. It happened during a trip which she had to take to a nearby village, where one of her sisters lived—

(At this point, as if formed high in the air, a Voice—mawkish and echo-like, but clear—speaks.)

THE VOICE. A village of ill fame, similar, alas! to others which still remain on this wild island.

(Dumfounded, the COUNT and COUNTESS don't know where to look.)

COTRONE *(quickly, to put them at ease)*. It's nothing, just voices. Do not be alarmed! I'll explain shortly—

THE VOICE *(from the cypress)*. A human being is killed like a fly.

COUNTESS *(startled)*. Good heavens! Who's talking?

COUNT. Where do these voices come from?

COTRONE. Don't worry, Countess, don't become uneasy. They are formed in the air. I'll explain.

LA SCRICIA. It's the murdered! Do you hear? Do you hear them? *(COTRONE, unnoticed by her and smiling, indicates the contrary, his hand to the COUNTESS, as if to say behind LA SCRICIA, "Don't believe her; we're doing it for her!" But LA SCRICIA notices him and is angered.)* What do you mean, no? Of course, it's the child!

COTRONE *(eagerly, pretending)*. The child, that's right, the child . . . *(And immediately to ILSE.)* It's the tale of a wagoner, Countess, who met a little boy by night on the highway around here, made him climb on the wagon, and because he had heard a couple of pennies jingle in his pocket, he killed him while he was asleep, in order to buy some tobacco when he got to the village. He threw the little corpse behind a hedge, and gee-hol in step with his singing he continued on his way under the heavenly stars—

LA SCRICIA *(fiercely)*—Under the eyes of God who was watching him! And He watched him so closely that, you know what the assassin did? At dawn, instead of going to his boss, he went to the police station and gave himself up, holding in

his bloodstained hands the little boy's pennies and speaking as if someone else were talking through his mouth. See what God can do?

COTRONE. With such faith she did not fear to set out by night—

LA SCRICIA. Nonsense, by night! I wasn't supposed to set out by night; was to set out by dawn. It was my neighbor, whose donkey I had asked to borrow.

COTRONE. That farmer wanted to marry her.

LA SCRICIA. That's not the point! He woke up in the middle of the night, worrying about getting the donkey to me by dawn; the moon was out and he thought it was dawn. I noticed it right away, when I looked up at the sky, that that was not daylight, but moonlight. As I am old, I made the sign of the cross, climbed on, and off I was. But when I got to the highway . . . by night . . . out in the open country . . . with those awful shadows . . . and in that silence which smothered in the dust even the noise of donkey's hoofs . . . and that moon . . . and that long white road . . . well, I pulled my cloak over my eyes and felt sheltered. Perhaps it was because of weakness or the slow pace of the journey, I don't know what . . . anyway, after a while I found myself as if awakening, between two long rows of soldiers . . .

COTRONE (*as if to focus the attention, now that the miracle will occur*). That's it, that's it . . .

LA SCRICIA (*continuing*). Those soldiers were walking along the two sides of the highway, and at their head, in front of me, rode the Captain on a majestic white horse. I felt quite consoled at that sight and I thanked God for having chosen that very night of my trip to have those soldiers also go to Favara. But why so silently? They were young fellows, about twenty years old. . . . They didn't even laugh to see an old woman riding a donkey in their midst. I couldn't even hear their footsteps, and they didn't even make any dust. . . . Why?

How was this possible? I found out at daybreak, when the village was in sight. The Captain stopped on his great white horse; he waited for me to reach him on my donkey. "Sgricia," he said, "I am the Angel-100, and these soldiers who have escorted you up to here are the souls of Purgatory. As soon as you arrive, make your peace with God, for you will die before noon." Then he disappeared with his holy escort.

COTRONE (*quickly*). But now comes the best part! When her sister saw her arrive pale and convulsed—

LA SGRICIA. "What's wrong with you?" she shouted, and I said:

"Get me a priest."

"Are you sick?"

"I'm going to die before noon."

(*She opens her arms.*) . . . And it was the truth. . . . (*She bends forward to look into the Countess's eyes and questions her.*) Do you think perhaps that you are still alive? (*She makes a negative gesture with her forefinger in front of her face.*)

THE VOICE (*from behind the cypress*). Don't you believe it!

(*The little old woman smiles approvingly at the COUNTESS and gestures, meaning: "You hear? It is telling you." Now, smiling and satisfied, she goes back into the villa.*)

ILSE (*turns toward the cypress at first, then looks at COTRONE*). Does she believe that she is dead?

COTRONE. That she is in another world, Countess, along with all of us . . .

ILSE (*very uneasily*). In what world? And what about these voices?

COTRONE. Accept them! Do not try to figure them out! I could perhaps . . .

COUNT. But are they set up?

COTRONE (*to the COUNT*). If it helps you to penetrate into

another truth, far removed from yours, though just as unpredictable and changeable . . . (*To the COUNTESS.*) do remain so removed and try a bit to understand how this little old woman has seen the Angel. One must not reason any more. That's how we live out here. We are deprived of everything, but we have all the time in the world to ourselves: an inexplicable wealth and a fermentation of idle fancies. All the objects which are around us speak and have a meaning only in the imagination to which we happen to relegate them, out of desperation. But mind you, I mean desperation in our way of speaking. We are more or less placid and lazy; we relax and conceive the—how shall I say it?—the mythological absurdities; these are most natural, given the nature of our existence. We cannot live on nothing; hence it is a constant heavenly intoxication. We breathe fictitious air. Angels can descend amidst us like nothing at all, and all those things which are born inside us are bewildering to our very selves. We hear voices, laughter; we see enchantments rise at every shadow's corner, created by the colors which remain confused in our eyes, dazzled as they are by the overabundant sun of our island. We cannot bear a dull shadow. The images are not invented by us; they are rather a desire of our very eyes. (*He listens.*) There! I hear her coming. (*He shouts.*) Magdalen! (*Then, pointing.*) There on the bridge.

(*MARY MAGDALEN appears on the bridge in a red light cast by the small lamp which she holds in her hands. She is young, with tawny hair and pink skin. She is dressed in red, country style, and appears like a flame.*)

ILSE. Heavens! Who is that?

COTRONE. It's the "Red Lady." Don't be frightened. She is flesh and bone, Countess. Come here, Magdalen, come here. (*And as Magdalen advances, he goes on speaking.*) A poor fool, who feels but does not talk. She is all alone, with no one in the world, and wanders through the countryside. Men lay

hands on her, and she is completely ignorant of what has so frequently happened to her; she abandons her little creatures on the grass. Here she is now. Her eyes and lips are always smiling with the pleasure which she gives and receives. She comes almost every night to shelter herself with us in the villa. Go on in, Magdalen, go on in.

(MARY MAGDALEN, *always smiling sweetly with her lips but with a trace of sadness in her eyes, nods several times and enters the villa.*)

ILSE. And whose is this villa?

COTRONE. It is ours and it is nobody's. It belongs to the ghosts.

COUNT. How's that, the ghosts?

COTRONE. Why yes. The villa has the reputation of being haunted. That's why it was abandoned by its former masters, who were so frightened that they even ran away from the island, many years ago now.

ILSE. You don't believe in ghosts . . .

COTRONE. Why not? We create them!

ILSE. Oh, you create them . . .

COTRONE. I beg your pardon, Countess, but I didn't expect to hear that from you. It is impossible that you do not believe in them, the way we do. You actors give bodies to phantasms in order that they may live—and they do live! We do the opposite: we make phantasms of our bodies, and we make them live just the same. It is not really necessary to go far away to look for phantasms: all we have to do is to let them come out of ourselves. You said you are a ghost of what you were?

ILSE. Indeed, and more than that . . .

COTRONE. There you have it. What you were. All you have to do is to let it come out. Don't you think it is still alive within you? Isn't the ghost of that young man who killed himself for you alive? You have him within you.

ILSE. Within me . . .

COTRONE. And I could have him appear for you. Look, he's in there. (*He points at the villa.*)

ILSE (*getting up, with horror*). No!

COTRONE. There he is!

(*SPIZZI appears on the threshold of the door, disguised as a young poet, resembling the one who had killed himself for the COUNTESS. He makes use of the clothes found in the villa's extravagant wardrobe for apparitions: over his shoulders he has a black cloak, like the ones which were once worn over formal dress; around his neck a white silk scarf; on his head he has an opera hat. Hidden under the cloak, which bulges elegantly where he holds it by the two sides, he holds an electric lantern that lights up his face from the bottom up, like a specter. As soon as she sees him, the COUNTESS shrieks and falls back on the bench, hiding her face.*)

SPIZZI (*running to her*). No, no, Ilse . . . Good Lord . . . I wanted to play a trick . . .

COUNT. Oh, it's you, Spizzi! Ilse, it's Spizzi . . .

COTRONE. He has come out of himself, to look like a ghost!

COUNT (*irritated*). Bah! what are you talking about now?

COTRONE. The truth!

SPIZZI. It was joking!

COTRONE. And I, my dear sir, I have always invented the truth! And people have always thought that I was lying. One never has a better chance of speaking the truth than when one invents it. Here's the proof! (*He designates SPIZZI.*) You were joking? You obeyed! Masks are now chosen at random. And here are other proofs . . . more proofs . . . (*Coming back on the stage from the main door of the villa are DIAMANTE, CROMO, BATTAGLIA, and LUMACHI. They are disguised, and each is differently lighted up by a colored lantern held concealed in his hands. They come in the order of COTRONE's presentation; the rest will follow.*) You (*taking DIAMANTE by the hand*) of

course, dressed like a Countess. . . . (*To the COUNT.*) Did you, perhaps, hold some office at court, Count?

COUNT (*stunned*). No, why?

COTRONE (*pointing at DIAMANTE's dress*). Because it is really the attire of a lady in waiting. . . . (*Turning toward BAT-TAGLIA*). And, like a turtle in a shell, you felt well at ease in this old bigot's costume. (*Now indicating LUMACHI, who has thrown over himself a donkey's hide with a cardboard head.*) And you thought about the donkey that you need. . . . (*Then, going over to shake CROMO's hands*). And you dressed up like a pasha; I congratulate you: you must know how to live. . . .

COUNT. What on earth is the meaning of this masquerade?

CROMO. In there (*pointing to the villa*) there's a whole supply for ghost-making!

LUMACHI. You should see the costumes! A costume shop doesn't have so many!

COTRONE. And each of you went and chose the mask which best suited you!

SPIZZI. Oh, no, I just did it—

COUNT (*irritated*). As a joke? (*Pointing at the costume SPIZZI has on.*) You think it's a joke to dress up like that?

ILSE. He obeyed—

COUNT. Whom?

ILSE (*pointing at COTRONE*). He obeyed him, who is a magician, didn't you hear?

COTRONE. No, Countess—

ILSE. Be still, I know all about it! . . . Do you invent the truth?

COTRONE. I have never done anything else in my life! And inadvertently, Countess. All those truths which our conscience refuses. I make them emerge from the secrecy of our senses, or if they are more frightening, from the deep recesses of our instinct. Back home, I invented so many of them that I had to run away, as I was pursued by scandals. Here I try to dis-

solve them into phantasms, into vanishing visions. Fleeting shadows. With these friends of mine, I attempt to dissipate even outer reality into expanded brightnesses, by shedding the soul, like so many puffs of colored clouds, into the dreaming nighttime.

CROMO. Just like fireworks?

COTRONE. But minus the shooting. They are noiseless enchantments. The foolish outsiders are afraid of them and stay away; so, we remain the masters here. The masters of nothing and of everything.

CROMO. And how do you live?

COTRONE. Like this. With nothing and with everything.

DOCCIA. One can only possess everything when one has nothing.

CROMO (*to the COUNT*). Well, do you hear? That's just the case with us. Do we then possess everything?

COTRONE. No, not quite, because you would still like to possess something. When you will really no longer wish for anything, only then will you be set.

MARA-MARA. One can sleep without a bed—

CROMO. —Not too well—

MARA-MARA. —But one can sleep!

DOCCIA. Who can keep sleep away from us, when God who wants us to be healthy sends it to us when we are tired, like a divine grace. Believe me, when you're tired you sleep, even without a bed!

COTRONE. And one must be hungry in order to really enjoy a hunk of bread, because even the most exquisite food will never be enjoyed if one is full or not hungry. Isn't that right, Quaqueo?

(QUAQUEO *smiles and nods, imitating with his hand on his stomach the motion of a child who wants to show he is enjoying something.*)

DOCCIA. And only when you don't have a home does all the world become yours. No matter where you are, you will commit yourself on the grass to the silence of the heavens. You are all and you are nothing; . . . and you are nothing and you are all.

COTRONE. So speak the beggars, Countess, who are very fine people, with rare tastes, and who have been able to wind up in this exquisitely privileged condition, which is beggary. There is no such thing as a mediocre beggar. The mediocre are all sensible and thrifty. Doccia here is our banker. For thirty years he saved up that extra penny with which importuned men can afford the luxury of charity, and he has come here to donate it to the freedom of dreams. He pays for everything.

DOCCIA. Yes, but, if you don't take it easy—

COTRONE. He is pretending to be stingy, to make it last longer.

THE OTHER SCALOGNATI (*laughing*). That's true! That's true!

COTRONE. I too could have been a great man, perhaps, Countess. But I resigned. I resigned from everything: from formality, honor, dignity, virtue, which are things that all animals ignore, thank God, in their blissful innocence. Once the soul is freed from all these obstacles, it remains as great as the air, full of sunshine or clouds, open to all lightnings, abandoned to all the winds; it is a superfluous and mysterious substance for marvels, which elevates us and scatters us to fabulous distances. Just look at the earth—what a plight! There may be someone down there who is under the illusion of living our life; but it isn't so. No one of us occupies the body that another person sees us in, but rather the soul which speaks . . . who knows from where: nobody can tell. It's one appearance after another, with this comical name of Cotrone . . . he with Doccia . . . and he with Quaqueo . . . The body is death: it is shadow and stone. Woe unto him who sees him-

self in his own body and with his own name. Let's be ghosts—all the ghosts which come to our minds. Some are forced. Take, for instance, the ones of the little Scotch girl with the umbrella (*indicating* MARA-MARA) or of the dwarf in the purple cape. (*QUAQUEO acknowledges this as his particular attribute.*) These are the specialty of the villa. But all the others are the creations of our fantasy. With the divine prerogative of children who take their games seriously, we transfer the wonder which is inside us to the things we are playing with, and allow ourselves to be charmed by them. So it is no longer a game, but a marvelous reality that we live in; far away from everything, and even reaching excesses of madness. Well then, my friends, let me tell you what they once used to tell pilgrims: Unlace your boots and put down your staff. You have reached your goal. I have been waiting for years for people like you to come around, in order to give life to other ghosts that I have thought up. But we shall give your *Tale of the Changed Son* too, like a marvel that becomes satisfied with itself and without asking for anything or anyone.

ILSE. Give it here?

COTRONE. Just for ourselves.

CROMO. He's inviting us to stay out here forever, don't you hear?

COTRONE. But of course! What more can you possibly be looking for among men? Don't you see what you gained from them?

QUAQUEO and MILORDINO. That's right, stay here. Here with us! Here with us!

DOCCIA. Uuuh! They're eight!

LUMACHI. As for me, I'm game. I'll stay.

BATTAGLIA. The place is beautiful . . .

ILSE. That means that I shall proceed alone to read the *Tale*, if I shall be unable to perform it.

SPIZZI. No, Ilse. Whoever wants to stay can stay, but I shall always follow you!

DIAMANTE. Me too! (*To the COUNT.*) You can always count on me!

COTRONE. I understand well that the Countess cannot give up her mission.

ILSE. Until the very end.

COTRONE. You yourself don't want the work to live by its own merit, as it could only out here.

ILSE. It is alive within me, but that's not enough. It must be alive among mankind also!

COTRONE. Poor work. Just as the poet did not have your love, so it will not have glory among men. But enough of this. Now it's late, and it is best to go and get some rest. Since the Countess refuses, I have an idea. We'll see what you think of it tomorrow morning at dawn.

COUNT. What idea is that?

COTRONE. Tomorrow at dawn, Count. The daylight dazzles; the night belongs to our dreams, and only the twilight of dawn makes things clear to man. Dawn is for the future, sunset for the past. (*He lifts his arm to indicate the entrance to the villa.*) Until tomorrow!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

The ghost supply room: a huge room in the center of the villa, with four doors; two of the doors are on one side, two on the other, as if two parallel corridors led up to them. The rear wall is smooth and bare, and, when indicated, will become transparent; then, beyond it, as in a dream, there will first be seen a dawn sky with white clouds. Then, the gentle slopes of the base of the mountain, of a very soft green color, with trees surrounding an oval fish pool. Finally (but later, during the forthcoming dress rehearsal of the "Tale of the Changed Son"), a beautiful seacoast with a harbor and lighthouse tower. The inside of the large room is taken up with the oddest household implements, with furniture which is not really furniture but big, old, dusty toys. Everything must be prepared and predisposed, however, to become the setting for the "Tale of the Changed Son," at a moment's notice. There are, in addition, musical instruments, a piano, a trombone, a drum, and five enormous skittles with human faces forming the heads. Also many dummies awkwardly placed on the chairs: three sailors, two gay women, one hairy old man in a morning coat, and one gruff lady-purveyor.

When the curtain goes up, the stage is lighted by an unnatural light, but one cannot tell how or from where. The dummies on the chairs look human in this light and cause a strange sensation, even though the immobility of their masks reveals their identity as dummies.

ELSE appears from the first door on the left; she is fleeing, and the COUNT is following, trying to stop her.

ELSE. No, no, I want to go outside, I tell you. (Surprised and half-frightened, she stops on her tracks.) What's this?

COUNT. Humm! It's probably what they called the ghost supply room.

ILSE. What about this light? Where does it come from?

COUNT. (*Pointing at the dummies*). Just look at them! Are they dummies?

ILSE. They look real—

COUNT. —I suppose, and as if they pretended not to see us. That's amazing—Look! you would think that they were made especially for us to fill the vacancies in our troupe: the old man at the little piano—look, and that coffee-shop keeper, and the three young sailors whom we can never find.

ILSE. He must have prepared them.

COUNT. Why he? What does he know about it?

ILSE. I've already given him the *Tale* to read.

COUNT. I see. That explains it. But what can we do with dummies? They don't talk. I still cannot figure out where we have landed out here. And in this state of uncertainty, I should like to feel, at least, that you—(*He approaches her and goes to touch her, timidly and tenderly.*)

ILSE. (*startled and raging*). Oh, Heavens! How can we get out?

COUNT. You mean you would really like to go out?

ILSE. Yes, yes—to go away, away!

COUNT. But where?

ILSE. I don't know—just outside, in the open.

COUNT. In the night? It's very late; everyone is asleep. Why go out alone at this time?

ILSE. I hate to lie on that bed—

COUNT. Yes, I understand that; it's so tall it's horrible.

ILSE. —With that violet, moth-eaten quilt.

COUNT. But it's a bed, after all.

ILSE. You can go and sleep on it; I can't.

COUNT. And what about you?

ILSE. There's that little bench outside, in front of the entrance.

COUNT. But if you're alone, you will be more afraid outside; at least upstairs you're with me.

ILSE. My dear, it's of you that I am afraid—of you alone, can't you understand?

COUNT. (*surprised*). Afraid of me? Why?

ILSE. Because I know you. And I see you. You follow me like a beggar.

COUNT. Shouldn't I stay close to you?

ILSE. Not that way, though! Looking at me all the time! I feel, I don't know, I feel . . . all sticky, that's it, with this soft, beseeching timidity of yours. It's in your eyes, in your hands . . .

COUNT (*mortified*). Because I love you . . .

ILSE. Thank you, darling! You always have the knack of thinking about it in the wrong places, or when I feel completely worn out. The least I can do is run away. Sometimes I feel like screaming for all I am worth. Do you know that you are terribly demanding?

COUNT. Demanding?

ILSE. That's right. Demanding. Do you want to get out of me everything that you have lost?

COUNT. Ilse! How can you think of such a thing?

ILSE. Oh, fine! I suppose you're even going to force me to apologize now.

COUNT. I? What on earth are you talking about? I haven't lost a thing and I don't feel I've lost anything so long as I have you. Is this what you call demanding?

ILSE. You're horrible . . . you're unbearable. You're always looking for something in my eyes. I can't stand it!

COUNT. I have a feeling you're distant; I'd like to call you back—

ILSE. Always for one thing—

COUNT (*offended*). No! For what you once were to me—

ILSE. Oh, once! When was that? Can you tell me perhaps in what other lifetime? Oh, honestly, now: Can you still see in me what I was?

COUNT. But aren't you still and always my Ilse?

ILSE. I don't even recognize my own voice any more. I talk and I hear my voice . . . I don't really know . . . other people's voices and all the noises, as if the air had become dull—I just don't know, and the words in it were cruel to me. So spare me them, I beg you!

COUNT (*after a pause*). So it is true then?

ILSE. So what's true?

COUNT. That I am all alone. That you don't love me any more.

ILSE. Oh, you silly creature! How can you say that I don't love you any more, when I just can't see myself without you? I ask you not to expect it, my dear, because, good heavens, you know how that is only possible for me when you don't even think about it. You must feel it, darling, without thinking. Come, now, be reasonable.

COUNT. I know that I should never think of myself.

ILSE. You say you want the welfare of others!

COUNT. I'd like my own too, sometimes! Had I been able to imagine—

ILSE. I've even forgotten how to feel sorry about something.

COUNT. No, I mean that your feelings—

ILSE. But they're the same, they're always the same!

COUNT. No, that's not true. At first—

ILSE. Are you really sure about at first—that my feelings would have lasted in those other conditions? At least this way, one way or another, they last. Just look at us. It's a miracle if we are sure we are feeling our own body when we touch it with our hands.

COUNT. That's just the reason why.

ILSE. Why what?

COUNT. Why I should like to feel you close to me, at least.

ILSE. Am I not here with you?

COUNT. It will pass, I guess. I really feel lost. I know neither where we are nor where we are headed for.

ILSE. We can't go back now.

COUNT. And I don't see any way up ahead.

ILSE. This man here says he invents the truth . . .

COUNT. Well, of course, that's easy to say that he invents it . . .

ILSE. The truth of dreams, he says, which is more real than ourselves.

COUNT. Dreams! Of all things!

ILSE. But look at it this way: There is really no dream more absurd than this truth—that we are here tonight, and that this is true. If you think about it and get involved, it can be maddening.

COUNT. I think we've been involved in it for a long time now. We eventually got there. I remember the last time we went down the steps of our palace; we were treated with respect. I had Riri in my arm, the poor little thing. You never think about her, but I always do. She and all her white silky fur!

ILSE. Listen, if we had to think about everything we have lost!

COUNT. How many lights and chandeliers on that marble staircase. Coming down, we were so gay and confident, that when we found the cold, the rain, and all that black mist outside . . .

ILSE (*after a pause*). Nevertheless, deep inside us we lost very little, even if it was quite a bit materially. If we used our wealth to buy this poverty, we should not be disheartened.

COUNT. Are you telling me, Ilse? That's what I've always told you—you must not be disheartened!

ILSE. Yes, that's right. Let's go now. You are a good man. Let's go upstairs; maybe I'll be able to rest a bit.

(They leave by the same door through which they entered. As soon as they have left, the dolls bow, brace their hands on their knees, and burst out into derisive laughter.)

THE DOLLS.

Good Lord, how they make things complicated for themselves
And then they end up by doing—
What they would have done anyway—
Without the complications!

(The trombone makes an ironic comment with three short notes which are more like grumbles; the drum, all by itself like the trombone, and without drumsticks, stirs like a sieve and rattles approvingly; during the rattle, the five skittles bounce up with their coarse heads. Then the dolls fall backward, again laughing derisively, this time in "eh"—the first time they had laughed in "oh." Suddenly they stop and regroup themselves in their original poses. This happens when the far door to the right opens and LA SGRICIA enters, exaltedly announcing:)

LA SGRICIA. The Angel One Hundred! The Angel One Hundred is here. He is coming to pick me up with all his escort! Here he comes! Everybody kneel! Everybody kneel!

(At her command, the dolls fall to their knees, unassisted. Meantime, the large rear wall is lit and becomes transparent. One can now see the winged souls of Purgatory filing past in columns of two, like angels, with the Angel One Hundred in their midst mounted on a majestic white horse. An unseen chorus of soft clear voices accompanies the parade.)

VOICES. With the arms of peace,
When all is still,
'Tis God who brings aid
With faith and charity
To him who is weary,
To him who does wander.

(When the parade is about to end, LA SGRIKIA rises to follow it and leaves through the second door to the left, which stays open. As the last pair of souls flies off, the rear wall becomes more and more opaque. The music lasts a while longer, but grows thinner and softer; and the dolls get up one by one, throwing themselves lifelessly on the chairs. Shortly afterwards, CROMO enters backward through the open door; his expressions change, as in dreams: first his own face, then the mask of the Customer and the nose of the Prime Minister in the "Tale of the Changed Son." Though withdrawing as if from fear, he seems to be looking for a thread of sound, the origin of which he cannot find. He is certain that he has heard it. For a moment he thought it came from the well at the end of the hall. In the meantime, DIAMANTE enters from the first door to the right, dressed like the wizard Vanna Scoma, but with her mask lifted over her face. She sees CROMO and calls him.)

DIAMANTE. Cromo! (And as soon as CROMO turns around, she goes on.) Well, and what kind of a face are you making?

CROMO. What kind of a face am I making? How about you? You're in Vanna Scoma's costume and you forgot to pull your mask over your face.

DIAMANTE. Don't make me laugh. Do you call this Vanna Scoma? Whereas you, you've got the Customer's costume on and the Prime Minister's nose. I've still got my Lady-in-Waiting's dress on and I'm taking it off. You know, I'm afraid I swallowed a pin.

CROMO. Swallowed a pin? That's serious!

DIAMANTE (pointing at her throat). I feel it here!

CROMO. Now wait a minute—do you really think you've got the Lady-in-Waiting's costume on?

DIAMANTE. I was taking it off, I tell you, and in doing so—

CROMO. What do you mean, taking it off? Just look at yourself: That's Vanna Scoma's costume you have on! (As she

lowers her head to look at her dress, he quickly pulls the mask over her face with a finger.) And that's the mask!

DIAMANTE (*putting her hand on her throat*). Good Lord, I can't talk any more!

CROMO. Is it the pin? Are you really sure you swallowed it?

DIAMANTE. It's stuck here! Right here!

CROMO. Did you have it between your teeth while you were undressing?

DIAMANTE. Of course not. I think I swallowed it right now. And I'm even afraid I swallowed two of them.

CROMO. Two what, pins?

DIAMANTE. Yes, pins! pins! Though I may have dreamed of the other one! I don't know. Or maybe it was before the dream. The fact is that I feel it here.

CROMO. They're there. That's probably why you dreamed it, because they are pricking your throat. I'll bet your tonsils are inflamed.

DIAMANTE. Maybe. Dampness, you know, and overwork.

CROMO. You probably have fever too.

DIAMANTE. Maybe.

CROMO (*in the same tone of voice, briefly and piteously*). Drop dead.

DIAMANTE (*turning against him*). You drop dead!

CROMO. My dear, with the kind of life we're leading, the only thing to do is to die.

DIAMANTE. There was one rusty pin in the dress, but I remember I pulled it out and threw it away. I didn't put it in my mouth. And besides, if I'm not in a Lady-in-Waiting's costume any more—

(*BATTAGLIA arrives precipitously from the first door to the left; he is frightened.*)

BATTAGLIA. Good God! I saw something! I saw something!

DIAMANTE. What did you see?

BATTAGLIA. In the wall out there; something scary!

CROMO. Well, if you say that you "saw something," then it's true, because I "heard something"!

DIAMANTE. What? Don't scare me! I'm running a temperature!

CROMO. Out there at the end of the hall, where the well is. It was some kind of music!

DIAMANTE. Music?

CROMO (*taking them by the hand*). Come on.

DIAMANTE and BATTAGLIA (*together, drawing themselves back*). Oh, no, you're crazy! What music?

CROMO. Very beautiful music! Come with me! It's music . . . What are you afraid of? (*They go towards the rear on tiptoe.*) We have to find the right spot. It must be around here. I heard it, that's sure. It was out of this world. It came from the bottom of that well, see? (*He points through the second door to the left.*)

DIAMANTE. But what kind of music was it?

CROMO. It's a heavenly concert. This is the way it was: At first, I was moving away and couldn't hear it any more; then I got too close and still couldn't hear it; finally, all of a sudden, right on the right spot . . . There, don't move! Do you hear it?

(*One actually hears soft subdued music, as if muted. The three people lean forward and listen in single file; they are both in ecstasy and dismayed.*)

DIAMANTE. Heavens, it's true!

BATTAGLIA. It wouldn't be La Sgricia playing the organ, would it?

CROMO. Of course not! This is not something earthly. And if we move a step away, we don't hear it any more.

(*Indeed, as soon as they move away, the music stops.*)

DIAMANTE. Oh, no, let's hear more! Let's hear more!

(They stand where they were and hear the music again.)

CROMO. There it goes again.

(They listen awhile; then CROMO advances with the others and the music stops.)

BATTAGLIA. I'm so afraid I feel I'm falling apart.

CROMO. There's really a lot to see and to hear in this villa.

BATTAGLIA. I tell you I saw that wall out there! It opened up!

DIAMANTE. It opened up?

BATTAGLIA. That's right. I saw the skyl!

DIAMANTE. Are you sure it wasn't the window?

BATTAGLIA. Yes! The window was on this side and shut. There was no window in front of me. And it opened up. Boy! Moonlight the way you never saw it before, behind a long stone bench, with tufts of grass which were so clear that you could have counted each blade one by one. That fool dressed in red was there, the one who smiles and doesn't talk; she sat on that bench, and then a little finicky dwarf came.

CROMO. Quaqueo?

BATTAGLIA. No, not Quaqueo. A real one, with a tortoise-colored cape all the way down to his feet; it swayed like a bell. His face, on that big little head of his, looked painted with rust. He was holding a shiny little chest; then he crossed the bench as if to go away, but actually he hid back there and every now and then he raised his head to spy, the rascal, and see if she yielded to temptation. But she didn't budge; her head was lowered, her eyes fixed, and her lips smiling, with her little chest on her hands. Do you know I even saw her teeth a bit between her lips as they smiled?

CROMO. You didn't see her in a dream, did you?

BATTAGLIA. Certainly not! I saw her; I saw her the way I see you two now.

DIAMANTE. Oh, good grief, Cromo! Then I'm afraid I really did swallow that pin.

CROMO (*struck by a sudden idea*). Wait here a minute; I've got an idea. I'm going to my room and I'll be right back. (*He leaves through the door by which he entered.*)

DIAMANTE (*stunned, speaks to BATTAGLIA*). Why is he going to his room?

BATTAGLIA. I don't know . . . I'm afraid . . . Don't go away . . . Say, didn't it look as if those dolls there moved?

DIAMANTE. Did you see them move?

BATTAGLIA. One of them—I thought it moved—

DIAMANTE. Nonsense! They don't stir an inch!

(*CROMO returns rejoicing, like a child on vacation.*)

CROMO. There! I thought it was fishy! I suspected it. We, the three of us, are not really here!

BATTAGLIA. What on earth do you mean—we're not really here?

CROMO. Come on, be happy! It's nothing! Just don't make any noise and go up to your own rooms; you will be convinced!

DIAMANTE. About what? That we are not really ourselves?

BATTAGLIA. What did you see up in your room?

DIAMANTE. And just who are we then?

CROMO. Go up and see; you'll find out! It's really something to laugh about! Go on!

(*As soon as the two exit through the doors through which they came in, the dolls straighten up, stretch, and exclaim:*)

THE DOLLS. Ah, finally!

Thank God you finally caught on!

It took a long time!

I could hardly stand it any longer!

CROMO (*at first dumfounded when he sees them straighten up, then figures it all out*). Hey, you! Oh, that's right. Of course, you too . . . why not?

ONE OF THE DOLLS. Let's loosen up our legs a bit, shall we?

(Two dolls take him by the hand and stand in a circle, with the others. The musical instruments begin playing again, all by themselves, furnishing a dissonant accompaniment to the ring-around-the-rosy of the DOLLS and CROMO. In the meantime, BATTAGLIA and DIAMANTE come back, absolutely appalled. BATTAGLIA, as though he didn't know it, is dressed like a "gay little woman," with a filthy old cap on his head.)

DIAMANTE. I'm going mad! It means that—this (*touching her body*) is not my body? But still I can touch it!

BATTAGLIA. Did you see yourself up there too?

DIAMANTE (*pointing at the dolls*). All these dolls standing up. . . . Good God—where am I? I'm going to scream—

CROMO (*quickly putting his hand over her mouth*). Be quiet! Why scream? I found my body up there too; it was sleeping beautifully. We woke up outside, don't you understand?

DIAMANTE. What do you mean, outside? Outside of what?

CROMO. Outside of ourselves! We are dreaming! Don't you see—we are ourselves, but in a dream, outside of our bodies, which are sleeping up there!

DIAMANTE. And are you sure that our bodies up there are still breathing and are not dead?

CROMO. Dead? Mine is snoring! Blissfully, like a pig in its bin, with its legs wide apart, and its chest rising and falling like bellows!

BATTAGLIA (*afflicted and complaining*). Mine was with its mouth open, and it always slept like a little angel before!

ONE OF THE DOLLS (*laughing derisively*). Oh, how cute! Like a little angel!

ANOTHER DOLL. With drivel slavering off to one side!

BATTAGLIA (*aghast, pointing at the dolls*). What's that?

CROMO. It's all in your dream; they are too, don't you understand? You've become a gay little woman, don't you see? Here's a little sailor for you; come on, hug him! (*He throws*

him into the arms of one of the dolls in a sailor's costume). Come, now; everybody dance merrily! It's in our dream!

(*The instruments play again. They dance, but with weird, angular motions, the way dolls would dance, because of their inability to bend gracefully. SPIZZI appears from the first door to the left; he makes his way through the dancing couples. He has a rope in his hands.*)

SPIZZI. Look out, look out! Let me get through!

CROMO. Hey, Spizzi! You too! What's that in your hand, and where are you going?

SPIZZI. Let me go! I can't stand it any more! I'm going to get it over with!

CROMO. Get it over with? With this rope? (*He lifts Spizzi's arm which holds the rope. When they see the rope, everybody bursts out laughing. Then CROMO yells at him.*) You fool! You're only dreaming that you're going to hang yourself! You're hanging yourself in your dream!

SPIZZI (*breaking away and running toward the second door to the right and disappearing through it*). All right, all right, you'll find out if I'm hanging myself in my dream!

CROMO. Poor fellow! The Countess's love!

(*LUMACHI and SACERDOTE arrive, very anxious and dismayed, from the first doors to the right and left.*)

LUMACHI. Good Lord! Spizzi is hanging himself!

SACERDOTE. Spizzi's hanging himself, he's hanging himself!

CROMO. No, not at all! You're dreaming that too!

BATTAGLIA. Spizzi's sleeping in his bed.

DIAMANTE. And so are you. Go up and see yourselves!

LUMACHI. Sleeping, nonsense! There he is over there; he has really hanged himself! Look!

(*The rear wall becomes transparent again, and one can see SPIZZI hanging from a tree. All shriek in horror and dash toward*

the rear. The stage suddenly becomes black, and in the darkness, while the actors disappear like visions in a dream, one can hear the derisive laughter of the dolls, which return to their chairs and remain motionless. The light comes back on and there is no one on stage except the dolls, in their original poses. Shortly after, the COUNTESS, COTRONE, and the COUNT enter from the first door to the left.)

ILSE. I saw him! I saw him, I tell you, hanging from a tree behind the villa!

COTRONE. But there are no trees behind the villa!

ILSE. Yes there are—around the fish pool!

COTRONE. There is no fish pool, Countess; you can go and see for yourself.

ILSE (*to her husband*). Is that possible? You saw it too!

COUNT. Yes, I did, too.

COTRONE. Be calm, Countess. It's the villa. Every night there is self-produced music and dreaming here. And the dreams, unknown to us, live outside of ourselves, incoherent as we may make them. Only poets can give coherence to dreams. Behold Mr. Spizzi—do you see him? In flesh and bones, he who certainly was the first to dream that he hanged himself.

(In fact, SPIZZI has appeared from the door to the left; he is as if in a cloud. Amazed and offended, he snaps out of it at COTRONE'S words.)

SPIZZI. How do you know?

COTRONE. We all know it, my dear.

SPIZZI (*to the COUNTESS*). You too?

ILSE. Yes, I dreamed it too.

COUNT. So did I.

SPIZZI. Everyone? How is that possible?

COTRONE. It's evident that you cannot keep secrets from anyone, even while you sleep. Besides, I was explaining to the Countess that this is a prerogative of our villa. Whenever the

moon is out, everything gets dreamy on the earth, as if life were leaving it and a mere pale flash of it remained in our recollection. That is when dreams come out, and the more passionate people sometimes decide to put a noose around their necks and hang themselves from an imaginary tree. My dear young fellow, every one of us talks, and when we have talked we almost invariably realize that it was in vain; then we are disillusioned and we return to our inner selves, the way a dog returns to its kennel at night after it has barked at a shadow.

SPIZZI. No, it's the damnation of the words that I have been repeating for two years, with the feeling that the author intended for them!

ILSE. But those words are addressed to a mother!

SPIZZI. Thank you very much, I know that! But the man who wrote them wrote them for you, and he certainly didn't consider you a mother!

COTRONE. My friends, speaking about the blame which he is now giving the words of his part, look here: Dawn is near, and last night I promised I would let you know the idea I had for you—namely, where you could go and give your *Tale of the Changed Son*. That is, if you really don't want to stay here with us. You probably don't know that today they are celebrating with an enormous wedding party the union of two of the families of the mountain giants.

COUNT (*who is small and therefore lost, lifting up an arm*). Giants?

COTRONE. Not really giants, Count; they are called so because they are very tall and muscular, and they live on the mountain near us. I suggest that you go and meet them. We shall accompany you. But we shall have to know how to approach them. The kind of work they have chosen for themselves up there, the constant exercise of their strength, and the courage they always have needed to face all the risks and dangers of their huge task—excavations and foundations, water

ducts for mountain basins, factories, streets, agriculture—not only developed tremendously their muscles, but also left them a bit dense and beastly mentally. Though they are swell-headed because of their victory, there is an easy way to handle them: through their pride. If it is subdued, it becomes soft and manageable. Let me handle that aspect of it; you think about your business. It is nothing for me to lead you to the wedding of Uma di Dornio and Lopardo d'Arcifa, really nothing. And we shall also ask for a large fee, because the more we ask for, the more our offer will seem important to them. But our problem at present is different. How are you going to give the *Tale of the Changed Son*?

SPIZZI. Don't the giants have a theater up there?

COTRONE. No, I'm not talking about the theater. We can build a little theater anywhere. I am thinking about the work which you want to give. I spent all night reading your *Tale of the Changed Son* with my friends; we just finished a short while ago. Well, Count, it takes courage to maintain that you have all you need and that you will not cut any; you are only eight, and you need a whole population to give it.

COUNT. Yes, we need the supernumeraries.

COTRONE. Much more than the supers! Everybody says something!

COUNT. We've got the main characters.

COTRONE. The main characters are not the difficulty. What is important most of all is the magic; that is, creating the attraction of the *Tale*.

ILSE. You are right there.

COTRONE. And how are you going to create it? You don't have a thing. A choral work . . . Now I see, Count, how you spent all your money for it. As I read it, I felt I was transported. It is really written to be lived here, Countess, among us who believe in the reality of ghosts more than in that of bodies.

COUNT (*indicating the dolls on the chairs*). We have already seen those dolls there ready—

COTRONE. Oh, really? Already? That was fast. I didn't know it.

COUNT (*stunned*). What do you mean, you didn't know it? Didn't you prepare them?

COTRONE. Not I. But the whole thing is simple. As I read upstairs, they prepared themselves alone, here.

ILSE. Alone? And how?

COTRONE. I have already told you that the villa is haunted, my friends. I was not joking. Here, we are not surprised at anything any more. Human pride—forgive me—is really very stupid. There are other things that live a natural life on this earth, Count, that we cannot see in our natural state, but that we can perceive only through a defect in our five most limited senses. That is why, at times, when conditions are abnormal, these beings reveal themselves to us and frighten us. Of course—we had never supposed they existed! They are un-human dwellers of the earth, my friends—phantasms of nature, of any kind of nature, that live among us invisibly, in rocks, in woods, in the water, in the air, in fire. The Ancients knew them well, and the masses have always known them. We know it now, out here, we who compete with them and frequently overcome them, inasmuch as we compel them to give to our inventions a sense that is unknown to them or that they don't care about. If you still view life within the limits of the natural or of the possible, Countess, I warn you that you will never understand a thing out here. We are now outside these limits, thank God. All we have to do is imagine, and our imagination instantly takes on life, by itself. Just so long as something is quite alive within us, it will be represented spontaneously and unaided, by virtue of its very life. It's the free appearance of every necessary birth. At the most, we help along the birth somehow. Take those dolls there, for instance. If the soul of the characters that they represent incorporates

itself within them, you will see those dolls move and talk. And mark you well that the real miracle will never be the representation itself, but always the imagination of the poet in whom those characters were born living, so alive that you can see them even if they are not bodily there. This is what is ordinarily done in the theatres—on the stage they are translated into a fictitious reality. That's your job.

SPIZZI. So then you make us equal to your dolls there?

COTRONE. Not equal to them, no; but, you will have to excuse me, a little beneath them, my friend.

SPIZZI. Even lower?

COTRONE. If the soul of the character is embodied in the dolls, so much so that they move and talk, well . . .

SPIZZI. I should be curious to see this miracle!

COTRONE. Ah, you would be "curious," you say? You must realize that such miracles are not seen by curiosity. You must believe in them, my friend, the way a child believes in them. Your poet imagined a mother who believed that her child was changed into swaddling bands by those night witches . . . the wind witches that people call "The Ladies." Educated persons laugh at it, of course; you do too, perhaps. But I tell you that "The Ladies" are really existent! Yes, sir! We have heard them scream so often here, on stormy winter nights . . . with their piercing voices fleeing with the wind around here. Look here now; if we want to, we can even call them.

They enter by night into the houses

Through the open chimneys

Like

A black

Smoke.

What knows a poor mother?

She slumbers, weary from the day;

And they, bending in the darkness,

Stretch out their long fingers . . .

ILSE (*surprised*). Oh, you even know the verses by heart?

COTRONE. Even? But if we wanted to, we could give the *Tale* from beginning to end right now, Countess, in order to rehearse all those things that *you* need, not that we need. Try it once, Countess, try to relive your part as the Mother, and I'll show you, to give you a sample. When was your son changed?

ILSE. When? Do you mean in the *Tale*?

COTRONE. Naturally, when else?

ILSE. One night, as I was sleeping

I hear a wail; I awaken,

I grope in the dark, on the bed, at my side:

He is not there;

Wherefrom comes that crying?

In swaddling bands,

My child could not move

By himself—

COTRONE. Why do you stop? Continue. Ask, ask the way it's in the text: "Is that not true? Is that not true?"

(He has hardly finished before the stage, after having been dimmed for a second, is illuminated as if by a magic touch. It is a new kind of ghostly light, and the COUNTESS finds herself between two living women of the people called the TWO NEIGHBORS, as in the first act of the "Tale of the Changed Son." They answer almost immediately.)

FIRST. 'Tis true, 'tis true!

SECOND. How could he,

A child six months old?

ILSE (*looks at them, listens, and retreats in fear, along with SPIZZI and the COUNT*). Oh, good Lord! These women?

SPIZZI. Where did they come from?

COUNT. How is that possible?

COTRONE (*shouting at the COUNTESS*). Go ahead! Continue! What are you surprised for? You have attracted them! Don't

break the enchantment and don't ask for reasons! Say:
When I took him . . .

ELSE (*obeying and dumfounded*).

When I took him

Thrown as he had been, under the bed—

(*From above, but no one knows where, a derisive and powerful voice shouts.*)

VOICE. Fallen! Fallen!

(*The COUNTESS is terrified and looks upward, with the others.*)

COTRONE (*quickly*). Don't get lost! It's in the text! Go on!

ELSE (*allowing herself to be overcome by the miracle*). Yes, I know it!

So they all say: Fallen!

FIRST. Fallen? But how?

He can say it who saw him not under the bed,
Where he was found.

ELSE. Come, come: you tell

How he was found,

You who first heeded

To my screams:

How was he found?

FIRST. Turned about.

SECOND. His tiny feet

Towards the head

Of the bed.

FIRST. The swaddling intact

Tightly encircling

Both the tiny legs.

SECOND. And knotted with the tape . . .

FIRST. Perfectly so.

SECOND. Therefore, he had been taken,

Taken with one's hands,

From his mother's side,
And spitefully placed
Under the bed.

FIRST. Oh, had it been mere spite?

ILSE. When I took him . . .

FIRST. What crying!

(From the inside and from all around, one hears a great incredulous laughter. The TWO NEIGHBORS turn around and shout, as if to guard against it.)

It was someone else!
'Twasn't the same child!
We can swear to it!

(There is again a second of darkness, still filled with the laughter, which stops the instant that the original light comes back on. CROMO, DIAMANTE, BATTAGLIA, LUMACHI, SACERDOTE arrive through various doors. They all chatter together as they come on stage.)

CROMO. What's this, what's this? Are we having a rehearsal?

DIAMANTE. I can't! My throat hurts me!

LUMACHI. Oh, Spizzi, my friend! God be praised!

BATTAGLIA and SACERDOTE. What's going on? What's going on?

COTRONE. Countess, you have just recited with two images which became alive directly through the imagination of your poet!

ILSE. Where did they go?

COTRONE. Disappeared!

CROMO. Whom are you talking about?

BATTAGLIA. What happened here?

COUNT. The Two Neighbors of the first act of the *Tale* have appeared to us here!

DIAMANTE. Appeared? How is that?

COUNT. Right here, unexpectedly, and they started to recite with her. *(He indicates the COUNTESS.)*

CROMO. We heard the laughter!

SPIZZI. These are all tricks and machinations! Let's not let these people dazzle us like boobies, we who are in this same trade!

COTRONE. Oh, no, my dear; if you say that, you are not in this trade! You are emphasizing something which is more pressing to you! If you were in this trade, you would let yourself be dazzled before everyone else, because this is the real sign that you are in the trade. Learn from the children, I said to you before, who play a game and then believe in it and live it out as if it were true!

SPIZZI. But we are not children!

COTRONE. If once we were children, we can always be children! And as a matter of fact, you too were amazed when those two images appeared here!

CROMO. But how did they appear? How?

COTRONE. In time! And they said what they had to say in time; is that good enough for you? All the rest—how they appeared or if they are real or not—is of no importance! I wanted to prove to you, Countess, that your *Tale* can live only here; but you want to go forth, and take it among mankind! So be it! Away from here, though, I have no special power to place at your service; mine is the same as that of my friends, and I put them and myself at your disposal.

(*At this point, from without can be heard the mighty din of the riding party of the Mountain Giants, who are going down to the village to celebrate the nuptials of Uma di Dornio and Lopardo d'Arcifa. The music and the shouts are almost savage. The walls of the villa shake. QUAQUEO, DOCCIA, MARA-MARA, LA SGRICIA, MILORDINO, and MAGDALEN break onto the stage excitedly.*)

QUAQUEO. There go the giants! There go the giants!

MILORDINO. They're going down the mountain!

MARA-MARA. All on horseback! And dressed for a party!

QUAQUEO. Listen to them! Listen! They sound like the rulers of the world!

MILORDINO. They're going to church for the wedding!

DIAMANTE. Let's go see them!

COTRONE (*with an authoritative and powerful voice, stopping all those who are running off with DIAMANTE*). No! No one leaves here! No one must show himself, if we are to go up there to propose the play! Let's all stay here to arrange for the rehearsal!

COUNT (*pulling the COUNTESS aside*). But aren't you afraid, Ilse? Do you hear them?

SPIZZI (*frightened and drawing closer*). The walls are shaking!

CROMO (*also frightened and drawing closer*). It sounds like the cavalcade of a horde of savages!

DIAMANTE. I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

(All stay and wait in suspense and fear, while the music and the din grow fainter in the distance.)

CURTAIN

Here is what happens in the Fourth Act (fourth "moment") of the "Mountain Giants," insofar as I am able to reconstruct it from what my father told me about the plot it was to have. This is as much as I know about it, and I have offered it, alas, without the necessary effectiveness, though, I hope, without taking any liberties. But there is something I cannot know. Toward the very end, actually during the whole of the second-last night of his life, my father's imagination was so occupied by these ghosts that, in the morning, he told me that he had had to sustain the terrible labor of composing all the Fourth Act in his head, and that, now that he had solved every difficulty, he hoped to be able to rest a while, happy that he would be able to write down everything that he had conceived during those hours as soon as he was well again in a very few days. What I cannot know, and what no one will ever know, is if the mate-

rial would have assumed a different appearance during its final conception, and also if he had not already found new directions for the plot and higher meanings to his story. All I knew from him that morning was this: that he had found a Saracen olive tree. He said to me, smiling: "There is a large Saracen olive tree in the middle of the stage; with this tree I have solved everything." And since I did not understand too well, he added: "To draw the curtain to it . . ." So I understood that he had, perhaps for several days, occupied himself in solving this factual detail. He was very happy to have found it.

STEFANO PIRANDELLO

The Fourth Act was to take place on the mountain, in an open space in front of one of the dwellings of the Giants.

It was to begin with the arrival of the actors, who were tired by the journey; they had their cart and were accompanied by some of the Scalognati. All were led by COTRONE.

The arrival of these strange and unexpected visitors aroused the curiosity of the inhabitants (not the Giants, who were never to have appeared on stage, but their servants and the workmen hired by them for their grandiose projects), who were now all seated for a great banquet in the rear of the stage. The tables were to be arranged so as to give the impression of reaching beyond the view of the audience, onto a wide, open space. Some among the closest feasters then would have arisen, astonished and perplexed, and asked the strangers questions, as if they faced beings who had descended from another planet. COTRONE, then, would have explained the desires of his companions to a reliable house-steward—namely, that they were actors and were ready to offer the gentlemen a first-rate artistic spectacle to celebrate the wedding and to add grandeur to the festivities now taking place.

This first scene would have shown the type of amusement that the Giants provided for the people, the type the people appreciated: the shouting and orgiastic songs of the Panta-

gruelian banquet, followed by the dances, and the streams of wine which start the feast off noisily. For this reason, the actors are mortified to find out that these people have not the slightest idea about theatrical productions, and are even more down-hearted when one who has heard about them steps forward and excites the desire of all the rest by saying that it is a great show with much fun. He is referring to puppet shows, with all their sound cudgeling on the head and back, to the clowns' buffooneries, or to the chorus girls or entertainers at a cheap night-club. But while COTRONE, who has been introduced by the house steward, goes off to propose the performance to the Giants, the actors find comfort in the hope, which they rationalize and attempt to materialize later, that the persons before whom they will perform will not be, or cannot be, so lowly as their servants and laborers, and even if it is doubtful that they will appreciate the full beauty of the *Tale of the Changed Son*, at least they will listen politely. In the meantime, they find it difficult to ward off the gossipy and frankly unceremonious curiosity of the populace who have crowded around them, and they eagerly await COTRONE's return with the answer.

But COTRONE returns to report that the Giants, unfortunately, even though they accept the proposal for the performance, and are ready to pay very generously, have no time for such things, since they have many affairs to attend to, even during that holiday. They suggest that the performance be given for the people: It is good to offer them some means of spiritual elevation from time to time. And the people acclaim frantically the new amusement which is to be offered to them.

Among the actors, the opinions are divided. Some, headed by CROMO, feel they are being given over to the fangs of raving beasts, that nothing can be done before so much ignorance, and that it is best to give up the enterprise. Others, with the COUNTESS, become bold because of the very display of ignorance and crudeness which discourages and frightens

CROMO's group, assert that the power of Art can be measured only before such illiterates, and feel very certain that the beauty of the *Tale* will conquer the virgin souls. Then there is SPIZZI, now fanatic, who is already preparing himself for this extraordinary performance, like a knight of old before a worthy challenge, and by doing so sets an example which shames those who are wavering. The COUNT is disgusted and bitter at all the vulgarity which surrounds him, and would like to spare the COUNTESS, at least.

COTRONE understands and tries to point out the enormous and unbridgeable gap which separates those two worlds that had so accidentally come in contact with one another: the world of the actors, on the one hand, for whom the poet's words are not merely the highest expression of life, but actually the only certain reality in which and on which one can live; and the world of the people, on the other hand, under the rule of the Giants, who are bent upon grandiose projects aimed at owning the strength and wealth of Earth. In this unceasing and vast toil the people find their direction in life, and in every conquest over matter they attain one goal of their very life; at this, each individual, along with all the rest, but even within himself, feels proud. But USE is so happy and ready to rehearse that COTRONE admits that everything is possible, even that she win, since she is so inspired.

"Hurry, hurry," she says. "Where are we giving the play?"

"Right here, in front of the people already gathered for the banquet. All we have to do is stretch a curtain to hide the actors while they are putting their make-up on and getting dressed for the stage."

In the middle of the stage there is an old Saracen olive tree. A rope is stretched between it and the façade. The rope upholds the curtain.

While the actors are anxiously getting ready, they are constantly disturbed by spectators who peek within and then call others up, who make fun of them. COTRONE thinks it wise to

give the unprepared audience certain ideas about the play, and proceeds to try to talk to the people on the other side of the curtain. But he is immediately greeted with buffooneries, wry faces, shouts, and vulgar laughter, and the Magician returns quite disillusioned; they hadn't even given him a chance to open his mouth.

"Don't worry over such a little thing; we're used to it," says CROMO, the old fogy, very bitterly, to comfort him. "Just wait a little while!"

They explain to COTRONE that he was booed because he is not used to the public. But now one of the Troupe will go out: CROMO, who is already dressed, with his Prime Minister's nose; he will improvise the necessary preliminary explanations. CROMO will know how to attract attention by beginning with some jokes. In fact, a clamorous approving laughter is heard immediately, followed by applause and incitements on the part of the public.

The reception accorded to CROMO gives a little courage to the downhearted actors, so much so that ILSE, along with SPIZZI and DIAMANTE, who were the most eager and most filled with fervor, now can contradict COTRONE's fears. The latter now understands that the whole affair will end badly, tries to dissuade them for the last time, and sadly reminds them of the happiness which they are renouncing—that is, the remembrance of the night full of enchantments that they spent at the villa, where all the phantasms of poetry came to life so naturally within them, and where they could go on living if only they wished to return and remain there forever.

Meanwhile, the mirth excited by CROMO is so great that it also prohibits him from fulfilling his purpose of preparing the public for the spectacle of poetry that they are to offer. CROMO comes back exhausted and dripping wet, because the excited spectators have sprinkled him with a water pump, for more entertainment. This is when the reckless pandemonium begins—the people shout for the actors to come out on stage and start

the show. What are they to do? ILSE, who is alone on the stage at the beginning of the *Tale*, breaks away from her husband and from COTRONE and heads for the stage in front of the curtain. She seems ready for a supreme sacrifice and is resolved to fight with all her might in order to make the poet's words prevail.

At this point, the contrast is most evident and the tension is about to erupt dramatically. The fanatical defenders of Art, who pride themselves on being the only upholders of spiritual good in front of the incomprehension and mockery of those slaves, are fatally induced to scorn them, to condemn them as people deprived of all spiritual values, and to offend them. The people, on the other hand, are equally fanatic, but represent a very different ideal of life; they cannot believe the words of those puppets, for so do the actors seem to them, not because they are disguised, but because they, the people, seem to know that these poor actors are so fixed upon their serious gestures and absurd expressions that they have placed themselves—who knows why—in quite in another world. Puppets, yes—but as puppets they should amuse. And after the first bewilderment, which was expressed by loud bellowings of annoyance and by unmannerly questionings—Who is she? and What does she want?—they demand that the COUNTESS stop declaiming so enthusiastically those undecipherable words, and that she give them a little song or a dance. Irritated by ILSE's tenaciousness, they begin to get violent. The drama of ILSE fighting the public is reflected behind the curtain by the agitation of the other actors and by the consternation of COTRONE and the COUNT. The ever growing and ever menacing storm moves suddenly onto the improvised stage when the COUNTESS offends the spectators by calling them brutes. SPIZZI and DIAMANTE run to the rescue, the COUNT faints, CROMO shouts to have everyone start dancing, and runs out himself in order to try to divert from ILSE the unleashed fury of the public. During the ensuing pandemonium, one can see several

images reflected against the curtain; they are shadows moving with gigantic gestures; their enormous bodies are fighting; their Cyclopean arms and fists are raised to strike. But by now it's too late. Suddenly there is a great silence. The actors return, carrying ILSE'S body, which has been broken like that of a puppet. She breathes her last and dies. SPIZZI and DIAMANTE, who had entered the melee to defend her, have been torn to pieces; nothing has been found of their bodies.

When the COUNT comes to again, he cries out over his wife's body that mankind has destroyed poetry in the world. But COTRONE understands that no one is to blame for what happened. For it was not poetry which had been refused; it was just that the poor, fanatical slaves of life, who today have no taste for spiritual things but who someday might very well have, had innocently killed the fanatical slaves of Art the way they would break rebellious puppets; for these slaves of Art are unable to speak to man because they have excluded themselves from life. This exclusion, however, is itself not complete, because they are not satisfied merely with creating their own dreams for themselves, but actually insist on imposing them on people who have other things to do and who have no time to believe in those dreams.

And when the extremely mortified house-steward appears to present the apology of the Giants, as well as an adequate indemnity, the weeping COUNT is induced to accept it. Almost furiously the COUNT says yes, he will accept—and he will use the price for that blood to build an illustrious and unperishable tomb for his wife. But though he is crying and expounding his noble feelings of loyalty to dead Poetry, one can hear in his voice that he now feels relieved, as if freed from a haunting care. And CROMO and the others experience the same feeling.

They all leave, taking ILSE'S body with them on the cart with which they came.

THE NEW COLONY

CHARACTERS

LA SPERA

MITA

LA DIA

MARELLA

SIDORA

NELA

CURRAO

CROCCO

TOBBA

CAPTAIN NOCIO

DORO

PAPIA

FILICO

BURRANIA

QUANTERBA

TRENTUNO

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA

IL RICCIO

NUCCIO D'ALAGNA

BACCHI-BACCHI

FILACCIONE

PALLOTTA

A young peasant—sailors—fishermen—customs guards

PROLOGUE

Nuccio D'Alagna's tavern on the wharves of a seaport of Southern Italy.

The rear wall is divided into sections which meet at a slight angle. The left section is occupied by an array of discolored shelves, one above the other, containing rows of dusty bottles of liquor of every color and description. In front of the shelves is an old-fashioned bar with a cup-shaped hollow for small change. At one end of the bar is a sink, with bottles and glasses of various sizes standing around it; at the other is an alcohol burner used to heat an old copper coffeepot with a bone handle, and a number of chipped earthenware cups. The other half of the rear wall, which sticks out further into the room, is almost entirely occupied by a dirty casement window extending from about three feet above the floor almost all the way to the ceiling. A street lamp outside this window affords some view of the wharves.

On the right is the entrance to the tavern, whose door is lit up by a light hung under the sign, outside, and hence not within view.

At the left rear corner a small door leads from the bar to the kitchen. Further toward the front another closed door leads to a flight of stairs going down to the cellar.

Tables, large and small, with benches and chairs around them, are placed around the walls and in the middle of the room.

The tavern is dimly illuminated by lamps hanging from the ceiling, consisting of wire, bulb and reflector. The whole place is dirty and depressing.

Outside a heavy wind is blowing up the sea.

When the curtain goes up, the tavern-keeper, NUCCIO D'ALAGNA, a gaunt, crooked old man with a beard circling his chin, is walking around the tables with a rag in his hand, wiping off the chairs and putting them in order. He wears on his head a stiff, dark blue cap with a wide leather visor, and over his shoulders a hairy old gray shawl with a dilapidated fringe around it.

At the first small table near the left wall, TOBBA, a sixty-year-old fisherman, has finished his supper and is sleepily puffing at a pipe. On his head is a long, flat, Scotch sailor's cap, formerly red but now faded and soiled, which he wears the wrong way around and hanging down over his neck. He has bulging, watery eyes, and a short, thick, fuzzy beard. Over his shoulders hangs a faded old jacket covered with bright colored patches, old and new. Around his waist is a faded red sash. He has on white duck trousers rolled up so that his tanned legs and bare feet can be seen.

A few seconds later MASTER NOCIO comes with an overbearing mien through the entrance on the right, but does not advance further into the room. He is a big-boned ramrod of an old fellow with hunched shoulders, a hard, frowning face, and angry eyes. He is dressed in the style of a prosperous boat-owner in a dark blue corduroy suit with a belted jacket and wide-bottomed trousers, a dull, light blue sash around his waist, and a big turned-up fur cap. He has no mustache, but sideburns that come down to the corners of his mouth.

MASTER NOCIO (calling from the doorway). Ho, therel (He whistles sharply.) You old stick, you!

NUCCIO (turning around when he hears the whistle and putting up one hand to protect himself from the light). Who's there? Oh, it's you, Master Nocio, is it?

MASTER NOCIO (before NUCCIO can come any closer). Stay where you are! The smell of you's too strong for me. (Then he goes over to NUCCIO himself and pushes his nose first one

way, then the other, with the tip of his finger.) A fine beak you have therel

NUCCIO. Let my nose alone. It's useful.

MASTER NOCIO. If you want to keep on using it, take a tip from me. Don't let my son Doro dirty his boots in this den of—

NUCCIO (*interrupting in an attempt to excuse himself*). But I—

MASTER NOCIO (*still talking to NUCCIO but with his eyes on TOBBA*). —This den of tramps and thieves!

TOBBA (*without losing countenance*). Are you speaking to me, Master Nocio?

MASTER NOCIO. I'm speaking to whomever it may concern.

TOBBA. Then it can't be me.

NUCCIO (*trying to break in again*). And how could I?

MASTER NOCIO (*shoving him away with one arm*). Out of my way! (*To TOBBA.*) Yes, I'm speaking to you, to you yourself, if you must know.

TOBBA. What do you know about that? And what have I ever stolen from you?

MASTER NOCIO. You're not to turn my son's head . . .

TOBBA. I?

MASTER NOCIO. Yes, you—with talk of that island of yours, may God send it to the bottom of the seal

TOBBA (*as if he had expected something else*). Oh, the island—(*smiling*) the bad men's heaven.

MASTER NOCIO (*to NUCCIO*). You wouldn't know from the way he talks that he'd been jailed there for twenty years, would you?

TOBBA. A tramp and a thief. All right. But for being a thief—(*He slips the jacket off his shoulders and points to it.*) There are more patches there than Christ ever had wounds on his body!

MASTER NOCIO. Go on with you! You beggars carry your patches—

TOBBA. Triumphantly, we carry them, like flags! And as for being a tramp, I can't remember a single day since I've been on God's green earth that I've gone without working.

MASTER NOCIO. A pretty kind of work, your smuggling!

TOBBA. I've never made a penny out of it for myself.

MASTER NOCIO. But you've opened the way for others to do wrong.

TOBBA (*going back to sit down*). Right and wrong! What can a man like you know about such things?

MASTER NOCIO. So *you* know all about them, do you? You who are the guiltiest of all! Yes, I mean you! Because any man alive is glad enough to steal with another man's hands, (*turning to NUCCIO*), isn't he, you old stick over there!

NUCCIO. That's God's truth you're speaking (as long as you don't apply it to me).

TOBBA. He's never stolen with his own hands, that's sure. As for me, Master Nocio, it's just a job to be done. I take any job that comes in hand. I don't ask questions. Loading and unloading, that's all. With a little extra pay for the risk involved.

MASTER NOCIO. Oh, there's a risk involved, is there? So you know that you're doing something wrong?

TOBBA. That I used to do, if you insist. Now that I am old, there's nothing for me to do at all. Yes, Master Nocio, it was a hard lot for me when I got caught. Six times they caught me. And the sixth time they sent me to the island. And there I went right on working. Only there we were all branded. It wasn't like it is here, where people are half white and half black, and the white half looks down on the other.

MASTER NOCIO. Why don't you go back to the island, then, if it suited you better there?

TOBBA. I'd be glad enough to, at that. But it can't be done. Word came after the earthquake to evacuate it completely.

MASTER NOCIO. True. They say, in fact my men have told me just recently, that it's sinking lower and lower into the sea.

TOBBA. Yes, it's been sentenced to doom. One day or another it will go under. When they took the few of us that came out of it alive, it looked to us—although we may have imagined it—as if the mountain top were caving in. I can still see just the way it looked there against the sky, almost as if it were breathing. There were steep grassy cliffs on every side. And in the few open spaces, the bare rocks still burned with the heat of the sun when I used to climb over them at nightfall, after work. And the huts clustered at the summit, when the darkness faded away, were the first to be bathed in the rays of the rising sun, just as we bathed our faces. Oh, it was quite different from the stench of the black water lapping at these wharves, I tell you. There the shimmering sea was so deep a blue that the sky seemed white by contrast.

MASTER NOCIO (*to NUCCIO*). That's the way he makes my son's head spin, do you see?

TOBBA. I've never gone after your son. He comes after me.

MASTER NOCIO. And you, when he comes, send him away, mind you.

TOBBA. It's because you have it in for me that he wants to be my friend.

MASTER NOCIO. I haven't got it in for you. I look upon you with total indifference. But I don't want my son hanging about you.

TOBBA. Don't forget, Master Nocio, that saints are made from the most common clay.

MASTER NOCIO. I've warned you, now. (*He starts to go away.*)

NUCCIO. Don't you want a drink? I have a wine here whose smell alone will make you dizzy.

MASTER NOCIO. No thanks, my friend. I haven't time for your wine. My daughter is waiting for me outside. (*To TOBBA.*) You've had the nerve to send word to me through my son that

I should buy that leaky old boat of yours and take you into my fishing fleet.

TOBBA. You'd be doing a very good deed if you did.

MASTER NOCIO. And what use would I make of that sieve of a boat?

TOBBA. It could put to sea well enough if you'd have it repaired.

MASTER NOCIO. And who's to repair you, I'd like to know?

TOBBA. I'm old, but there's still some life in my bones.

(At this point MITA comes in, shouting with fright, from the tavern entrance. She is a girl not yet twenty years old, with a blooming complexion, and wheat-blonde hair which she wears in braids crossed and pinned up at the back of her neck. She wears a long, wide, black wool skirt almost down to her ankles, pleated from top to bottom and enlarged over the hips, and a purple velvet jacket opening in the front over a yellow bodice with gold spangles. On her head she has a black shawl that falls over her shoulders to her waist. When she walks she crosses her arms over her chest and holds one edge of it with each hand, her face being almost covered. When she shows her face, she throws the upper part of it down over her shoulders like a hood, revealing its pale blue silk lining.)

MITA *(with her arms upraised as if to protect her face.)* Oh, Father! Help! Help!

MASTER NOCIO *(turning brusquely around)*. What is it? What has happened? *(He rushes out the door.)*

NUCCIO. Some rough fellow, is it?

MITA. No, a woman. A bad woman.

(MASTER NOCIO comes back, dragging LA SPERA jerkily behind him. She is a disreputable woman with desperate, dark eyes flashing out of a face so heavily painted that it seems like a mask. Contrasting with her painted face are the worn and faded trimmings of her dress, which is torn open across her

still shapely breast. She is wearing a torn dark shawl which she pulls up over her head when she is on the street, throwing it open every now and then before some passer-by on the wharves in order to reveal herself for what she is.)

MASTER NOCIO. What have you done to my daughter, you wretch? What did you say to her?

NUCCIO. Oh, it's La Spera, is it?

(From behind the bar, without being seen, DORO raises his head to see what is going on.)

LA SPERA *(to MASTER NOCIO, who will not let her go)*. Nothing! Nothing! Nothing at all! She can tell you that for herself.

MASTER NOCIO. Nothing? Then what has happened to frighten her?

MITA. Nothing, that's true. I was frightened by the way she came up to me, that's all.

MASTER NOCIO. You went up to my daughter? You dared?

LA SPERA. No, let me go! *(She jerks her hands away and looks proudly at MASTER NOCIO, who raises his hand as if to strike her.)*

MASTER NOCIO. I'll crack your head open!

LA SPERA. I didn't go up to her. I went up to the window there *(raising her hands to her eyes)* to try to see inside—

NUCCIO *(interrupting her)*. Let her go, Master Nocio. I know who she's looking for around here.

TOBBA. The father of her child.

MASTER NOCIA *(to MITA)*. Let's go away from here. I shouldn't have left you alone outside. *(He goes out with MITA, mumbling to himself.)* That's what comes of soiling one's boots in a dive like this.

NUCCIO *(to LA SPERA)*. Get along with you, now. You know perfectly well you're not to come in here alone.

LA SPERA. I never wanted to come. I was dragged in.

NUCCIO *(pushing her aside)*. If you're trying to foist that

baby of yours off on him, you'd better forget about it. Go along! Get out of here, without so much fuss.

(DORO leaps up from behind the bar. He is a precocious, overgrown boy fourteen years old, wearing sailor's bell-bottom trousers, a dark blue turtle-neck sweater, and a dark blue Scotch cap with two black ribbons hanging down the back.)

DORO. No! You miserable old coward! Don't put her out of here like that.

NUCCIO (*turning around, along with the others, in astonishment*). What do you know about that? It's the boy!

TOBBA. And how did he get in here?

NUCCIO. From the kitchen! But I'm putting you out too, young man, do you know that? (*He goes up to DORO threateningly.*)

DORO (*standing up to him*). Try and do it!

NUCCIO (*grabbing him by the arm*). You've got to get out. Your father's just been here—

DORO. Yes, I saw him.

NUCCIO. And he came to tell me—

DORO. I heard him.

NUCCIO. Oh, you were hiding there all the time, were you?

DORO. Exactly. And I'm not getting out.

NUCCIO. By the living God, yes, you are. And just tell your father that I sent you.

DORO (*slapping his trouser pocket so that the coins in it jingle*). I'm buying a pint of wine for Tobba.

TOBBA (*quickly*). No, thanks, my boy.

DORO. And as for her (*pointing to LA SPERA with a sudden access of timidity*), count her as being with me.

NUCCIO. Listen to that, will you? And he's hardly left his mother's apron strings!

DORO. I don't want her to get wet. Can't you see that it's started to rain?

LA SPERA (*who has been standing near the door, turning a tender look on the boy and then addressing NUCCIO*). I'm going now.

NUCCIO. And I'm telling you again that it's no use your coming back here to look for your fine gentleman. (*To TOBBA.*) She gets herself taken out in a rowboat, did you know that? I foot the bill and they go boating by moonlight for all the world like a bride and groom. And listening to her chatter, nine times out of ten he makes a mess. But he'll hear from me when he comes this evening. I won't give him so much as a crust of bread.

LA SPERA (*coming up to NUCCIO and catching hold of his hand*). Look here! (*She goes through the motion of spitting on his hand.*) I'm spitting for him on that crust of bread of yours!

NUCCIO. Oh, you're spitting on it, are you?

LA SPERA. Yes, and on everything you have to say. From now on anyone that wants to find me will have to look for me far away, in a place where I've never been.

NUCCIO. Are you raving, woman? Or are you simply drunk?

LA SPERA (*with faraway eyes, as if she were in a boat by night, looking out over the sea*). In a place where every word you say and hear rings brand-new (*turning to look at DORO*), like the words of that boy! (*She bursts out laughing, waving her hands in front of her face as if to brush away what she has been saying, and goes out murmuring.*) I'm drunk! Yes, I'm drunk!

NUCCIO. Go along; put your face in cold water. Water's good for diluting wine.

TOBBA. She has devils of her own to combat, no doubt, like the rest of us.

DORO. As for me, I'll not go, because it's raining.

NUCCIO. Yes, you will. I don't want any more trouble with your father, can't you understand?

DORO (*as if he had not heard, turning to TOBBA*). Tell me

this: How will the island disappear in the water?

NUCCIO. Oh, get along with you and your island.

DORO. Didn't you tell me that God had willed the earth to come out and stand above the water?

TOBBA. When you go to sea, I told you, and the waves beat around you as wildly as they're beating outside here tonight, so that you realize how easily they could rise out of the depths and suck the whole earth under, then you'll see how only God's will can ward off their swallowing it in a single mouthful.

DORO. Yes, because here on earth—

TOBBA. Men's courage is great enough to conquer the sea.

DORO. And what if the sea swallows up the island?

TOBBA. Well, you must remember that there are other things besides courage. God has given men courage to conquer the sea. But men are bad, my boy. And even if you're on top of the highest mountain, God can have the sea make a mouthful of it.

(Swarming noisily through the door, as if, running to take shelter from the rain, they had all met there together, with their jackets pulled up over their heads and one or two big red and green umbrellas, come CROCCO, FILLICO, QUANTERBA, TRENTUNO, PAPIA, FILACCIONE, IL RICCIO, BACCHI-BACCHI, BURRANIA, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, and CIMINUDU, the smugglers, pushing LA SPERA in with them. FILLICO, QUANTERBA, and TRENTUNO are the first to enter and take possession of a table. Then come CROCCO and PAPIA, who are dragging LA SPERA and trying to get her to sit down with them. Then come FILACCIONE, IL RICCIO, and BACCHI-BACCHI, who occupy a third table, followed by BURRANIA and OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, who stay to one side at a fourth, pull out a dirty old pack of cards, and begin to play. The last to enter is CIMINUDU, who goes over to stand near TOBBA.)

FILLICO. Heaven help us! I'm soaking wet!

CROCCO (*to LA SPERA*). Come on in! You'll wet your hair!

PAPIA. And the colors will run off your face!

LA SPERA. Let me alone and attend to your own business.

QUANTERBA (*to TRENTUNO, who is laughing*). What's so funny? Sit down, you simpleton.

PAPIA (*pulling LA SPERA by one arm*). No, over this way, with us.

LA SPERA (*pulling herself free*). I don't want anything to do with you.

(*She goes over to where TOBBA and DORO are sitting.*)

CROCCO (*to PAPIA*). Never mind about her.

FILACCIONE. Give me a pint here. I'll pay for it in cold cash.

IL RICCIO. And put some fodder in our feedbags. What have you got to give us?

BACCHI-BACCHI. How can you ask? The usual mess of beans!

DORO (*to LA SPERA*). You're all wet.

LA SPERA. It doesn't matter.

BURRANIA (*to NUCCIO*). A pint here, too!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. A bottle of red, paid for in cash.

(*NUCCIO D'ALAGNA has brought bowls of soup to QUANTERBA, FILLICO, and TRENTUNO and is carrying others to FILACCIONE, IL RICCIO, BACCHI-BACCHI, and PAPIA.*)

QUANTERBA. A pretty mess this is! Aren't you ashamed to serve us up such foul brew?

NUCCIO. A foul brew, you call it? Go on with you. You'll be licking the bowl before you finish. (*To CIMINUDU, whose green umbrella is still open.*) And put that thing down!

CIMINUDU. No. I feel like a cardinal under a canopy. (*To TOBBA.*) Aren't you making room for me? (*He closes the umbrella.*)

TOBBA. Sit here.

CIMINUDU. Well there, Tobba, the rosary's a holy business if you like. But you can tell your beads all day long to no purpose if you don't lift yourself by your own bootstraps.

CROCCO (to PAPIA). Currao's backing down, you'll see.

PAPIA. I saw him on the beach with some fishermen who had the nerve, in a sea like this, to throw their nets out in the surf.

FILACCIONE (to NUCCIO). Where's my wine?

NUCCIO. Pay your money in advance or else I'm likely to forget you.

QUANTERBA (*laughing with the rest and pointing to NUCCIO*). Forgetful, are you?

BURRANIA (to NUCCIO). And bring some here too, some red, before you forget it.

(Through the door, seeking shelter from the rain, come three peasants, one man and two women. The man is young and wears a rough cape, a black stocking-cap, gold earrings, and nail-studded shoes; the women, one young and one old, have shawls over their heads. Looking quite lost, they sit down at a table at the front of the stage, near to TOBBA'S. They gaze around, smiling ingenuously at anyone who leans over or raises his head to examine them.)

CIMINUDU (to TOBBA and LA SPERA). Fine little sparrows! Just look at them.

TOBBA. Straight from the mountains!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA (to BURRANIA). What's that there? Four and five make nine, and you're taking them with a jack?

LA SPERA (to DORO, *pointing at the peasants*). Go tell them to get out of here. This is no place for the likes of them.

CIMINUDU (*holding DORO back*). What's this? Sit down and leave them alone.

(NUCCIO D'ALAGNA has gone over to the new arrivals to take their order. And CROCCO gets up to hang around them with mischievous intent.)

LA SPERA (to DORO). No, go on. Look at how Crocco is out to make suckers of them.

NUCCIO (to the peasants). Something straight from the stove? Wine? Pickles? Peppers?

YOUNG MAN. What is there on the stove?

NUCCIO. Bean soup.

CROCCO. Excellent, brother. You can't help liking that.

TOBBA. Here comes Currao.

(CURRAO comes in, holding a dark purple scarf over his head with both hands in order to protect himself from the rain. Soon after entering the tavern, he lets it fall down over his shoulders. He is thirty-eight years old, with a youthful, agile body and a grim and disdainful expression. He is dressed in black, with a fur cap, a sailor's sweater, bell-bottomed trousers, and a silk sash around his waist. As he comes in he catches the eye of LA SPERA, who signals to him to watch CROCCO, the single young peasant, and his two women.)

NUCCIO (to CROCCO). What are you butting in for?

CROCCO. I wanted to know if he had just landed or if—

CURRAO (taking him abruptly by the arm). Shame on you!

CROCCO. Oh, it's you, is it? Who asked for you?

NUCCIO. Look here, I say—

YOUNG MAN. Who do you take me for?

CURRAO. For a sheep fallen among wolves, brother!

CROCCO. Me, a wolf? I only want to help him out.

PAPIA (joining him). Is he landing or leaving? If he's leaving, I have a boat for him!

TRENTUNO (to the younger woman). Don't forget that we're here too, sister.

CURRAO (to the young man). Clear out, that's my advice. (To the others.) Stand back, the lot of you.

NUCCIO (to CURRAO). See here, who asked you to be the

master in my house? (*To the peasants.*) Just stay where you are.

YOUNG MAN. We'll go. Thank you just the same. (*To the women.*) Let's get out of here. (*He goes out the door with them.*)

NUCCIO. So you're driving my customers away, are you?

CROCCO. He wants to become a saint along with Tobba, haven't you caught on to that?

CURRAO (*to CROCCO*). I've told you often enough that I'd never play the thief on dry land. I've never done it and I don't intend to see any of you do it either.

CROCCO. Well, what are you going to do about it? Report us to the police?

CURRAO (*gripping him by one arm*). Look here. You've stolen, and so have some of your fine friends here, and I've been the one to go to jail for it; yes, and Quanterba, here, with me, and him (*pointing to CIMINUDU*) and him (*pointing to TOBBA*). We've been taken while you stayed scot-free and went on stealing. So if anyone's been an informer around here, it's you, not me.

CROCCO (*quickly pulling his arm away*). Me? Prove it.

CURRAO (*Quickly*). I've given you proof enough.

CROCCO. Haven't they jailed me any number of times?

PAPIA. And me too!

CURRAO. Not as often as the rest of us. And they've let you go sooner.

QUANTERBA. True, true!

CIMINUDU. There must be an informer among us!

TRENTUNO. A traitor!

FILLICO. I could shout it out from the housetops!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. We can't go on like this!

CURRAO. A fellow may be watching two children at play on the beach or sitting out at the end of the wharf to see the boats go by, when all of a sudden the police grab at your chest

and slip a pair of handcuffs onto you. "In the jug!" they say. And you don't know what it's all about. Has there been a robbery somewhere? A brawl? Were you ever sent to the island? Then it's the jug for you! That way the police show that they're on the job. (*He goes up to CROCCO, trembling with anger but keeping himself under control.*) You've riled me this evening, I can tell you!

CROCCO. I've riled you? You've riled me, I say.

CURRAO. You called me an informer.

CROCCO. Because you're backing down.

CURRAO. Is that it? No, you must know something.

CROCCO. I know something? What?

CURRAO. That the police called me. That they gave me the third degree, to make me confess something I hadn't done, to make me tell them something I didn't know.

FILACCIONE. You *did* play the informer, then?

CURRAO. I was weak enough to—

TOBBA (*in astonishment*). What—you?

PAPIA. Yes, you?

CROCCO. He admits it!

CURRAO. What do you think I mean? I was weak enough to break down in front of them, to cry for rage because they wouldn't believe me—

PAPIA. And you talked? . . .

CURRAO. I begged them to help me . . . to find me a way to make an honest living—

(*All those present, except for TOBBA, LA SPERA, and DORO, break out into raucous laughter.*)

FILACCIONE. So they let you go—

PAPIA. Proposing a way to make some easy money as their confidential agent?

(*More laughter.*)

CURRAO. Oh, you're laughing, are you?

QUANTERBA. They made me the same proposition!

TRENTUNO. Me too!

FILLICO. And me!

CURRAO. I can see easily enough how they picked you out, or how he (*pointing to Crocco*) or someone even more rotten could fall in with their little suggestion. But how they could make such a proposition to *me* . . .

CROCCO. You must be ill!

(*More laughter, brusquely interrupted by CURRAO's savagely taking hold of CROCCO's jacket.*)

CURRAO. Watch out that I don't strangle you!

(QUANTERBA, PAPIA, TRENTUNO, FILACCIONE, and NUCCIO D'ALAGNA *intervene and separate them.*)

QUANTERBA. Stand off, there!

PAPIA. Don't be a swine!

TRENTUNO. That's enough!

NUCCIO. Get out of here, all of you.

CROCCO (*suffocating his anger while he is dragged outside*).
You'll pay for this!

CURRAO. Whenever you say!

PAPIA. Is it any more honorable to be a thief at sea than it is on land?

QUANTERBA. On land you have to rob one particular person. At sea you don't rob anyone.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. What do you mean, you don't rob anyone?

QUANTERBA. It's all impersonal. Just a matter of goods bought and sold. You rob the customs, that's all.

NUCCIO. That's enough, I tell you. (*To CURRAO.*) If you came here to have something to eat—well, there's the door. Go play the gentleman outside.

FILACCIONE. That way we'll go back to our fun.

NUCCIO. I'm not serving you!

CURRAO. You're not serving me because I don't want to be served, that's all. If I did want something to eat, we'd soon see how you'd serve me. You'd bring me everything (*pointing to the door on the left*) you have in your cellar.

TRENTUNO. That cellar's bursting at the seams—

CURRAO. And everything in it is ours, not yours!

NUCCIO. Oh, it's yours, is it?

CURRAO. Yes, sure!

QUANTERBA and the OTHERS. Yes, sure, sure!

CURRAO. That we got risking our own skins!

FILACCIONE. For a mere handful of money—

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. And a crust of bread that's so much poison!

NUCCIO. Here are the keys, then! Take it if it's yours. I'd like to see you do it!

LA SPERA (*To CURRAO, leaping to her feet and pulling a handful of coins out of her pocket.*) No! Come here! Don't let him get the better of you. (*She throws the coins resolutely down on the table.*) Here! Order something to eat!

(*There is a moment of silence while everyone waits to see what CURRAO will say or do.*)

TRENTUNO (*in a low voice*). Oh, oh!

PAPIA. Look at that now!

CURRAO (*who has gone slowly and threateningly up to LA SPERA, raising a hand as if to strike her*). That money of yours—

LA SPERA (*quickly, grasping his upheld arm*). What's the matter with my money? It's no dirtier and no cleaner than the money that goes through your hands!

CURRAO. I can dirty my own hands well enough without getting any of your dirt on them!

LA SPERA. And isn't your smuggling money good enough to eat on? Throw this money of mine in his face and tell him to bring you something to eat.

(*Two fishermen come in with a basket of fish.*)

FIRST FISHERMAN. Where's Currao?

PAPIA. Oh, the two fellows with the net!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. You've had a lucky escape!

FILLICO. There's Currao for you. (*He points him out to the first fisherman.*)

SECOND FISHERMAN (*holding out the basket to CURRAO.*)
Here's for the help you gave us.

QUANTERBA. Good God!

CURRAO. Thanks. I don't want to be paid.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Just look at those trout!

TRENTUNO. He was hungry for something to eat, and now . . .

CIMINUDU. Speaking of Divine Providence . . .

FIRST FISHERMAN. He played Divine Providence to us. With that heavy sea, if he hadn't given us a hand we'd never have pulled our net in this evening.

CURRAO (*cutting them short*). Do I get the basket too?

SECOND FISHERMAN. Oh, we can't give you the basket.

CURRAO. Then go along. I don't want anything.

TRENTUNO. Do you want to *eat* the basket?

FIRST FISHERMAN. There's over five pounds of trout in there!

CURRAO. I don't want them. Not unless you give me the basket.

SECOND FISHERMAN. You can wrap the trout up in paper—

CURRAO. I want the basket, I tell you! See that handsome handle? . . . Look, Tobba, you take one side of it and I'll take the other, and we'll go sell the trout out on the wharves. "Trout! Fresh trout! Just out of the water!"

(*He imitates, in a singsong voice, the cry of a South-Italian fish vender.* QUANTERBA, CIMINUDU, TRENTUNO, FILACCIONE, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, IL RICCIO, and BACCHI-BACCHI call out: Bravo! Good! Go to it!)

FILACCIONE (*to the fishermen*). Go ahead and give it to him! It's just an old basket.

FIRST FISHERMAN. Take it, then!

SECOND FISHERMAN. And good luck to you!

CURRAO. Come along, Tobba. (*To the fishermen.*) What's the right price to ask?

FIRST FISHERMAN. Trout! Live trout, that are still wriggling! We sell them wholesale, you know. But you can ask for more than that. Whatever you think—

TOBBA (*to CURRAO*). What's it matter! They didn't cost us anything!

SECOND FISHERMAN. Does a good deed seem to you so little?

TOBBA. It would turn bad if we were to profiteer.

CURRAO. Come along. Never mind. Let's go play at being honest men. Laugh, all of you, if you like! (*He grasps the basket by the handle and starts the refrain:*) Trout! Fresh trout!

TOBBA (*taking him up*). Just out of the water!

(*TOBBA and CURRAO, each holding a side of the basket, go out together amid an outburst of laughter.*)

CIMINUDU. Now we'll see how much money he makes at it!

LA SPERA. Well, he didn't make much before, did he? He hasn't the price of a meal in his pocket. . . .

NUCCIO. You're a fine one to say that! If he didn't waste his time hanging about with you all day—

TRENTUNO. Oh, you think he'd make so much money, do you? To look at how rich the rest of us are that follow the same trade! . . . Listen, Quanterba, what position do you say this fellow sleeps in? (*Pointing to NUCCIO.*)

QUANTERBA. On his back with his belly in the air.

TRENTUNO. Why so?

QUANTERBA. Because he eats too much!

TRENTUNO. And how much do you say I eat?

QUANTERBA. Very little, I say.

TRENTUNO. And how do I sleep, then?

QUANTERBA. On your side.

TRENTUNO. Do you see the difference?

(A confused noise comes in from the wharves, growing gradually nearer and nearer.)

PAPIA *(running to look out of the windows)*. They're shouting!

FILACCIONE *(going to join him)*. What can have happened?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA *(doing the same thing)*. They're coming to blows!

BURRANIA. Who are coming to blows?

FILLICO. I'm going to see. *(He rushes out the door.)*

PAPIA. I hear the voice of Crocco! *(He runs out too.)*

FILACCIONE. There are the police! There, there, see!

(They all get up to look out the window, and several others leave the tavern to go see what has happened. Meanwhile, the noise has come steadily closer until it is right at the tavern door.)

FILLICO *(coming back in great excitement)*. They've arrested Curraol

LA SPERA *(crying out loud and making for the door, followed by DORO)*. No!

FILLICO. Right out in front! There they are!

(CURRAO and TOBBA burst through the door, tangled up with the policemen who have arrested them. CROCCO, PAPIA, and other sailors from the harbor follow after, shouting. Amid the sailors' shouts of "Let them go!" TOBBA can be heard to protest, without losing his dignity.)

TOBBA. But they gave them to us, I tell you!

CURRAO *(struggling fiercely to free himself, speaks in a stronger voice)*. No! No! By all that's holy, let me go. I didn't steal them!

CROCCO. Yes, he did steal them! This one here *(pointing to CURRAO)*. And the basket, too!

LA SPERA. You yellow dog!

CROCCO. I saw him with my own eyes. He stole them! Right here, a few minutes ago!

LA SPERA. It's not true! All of you here are witnesses to that!

CURRAO (*wrenching himself free and grabbing CROCCO's jacket*). Did you see me steal them?

ALL. It's not true! It's not true!

FIRST FISHERMAN. What do you mean by stealing? We gave them to him ourselves.

SECOND FISHERMAN. We gave him the trout and the basket with them! It's a lie that he stole them!

ALL. Dirty liar! Dirty liar!

CURRAO. No! He isn't so bad. He's only a coward, looking for a coward's revenge. (*To TOBBA.*) Do you see now that it's no use your trying to sell a basket of fish that you came by like an honest man? You simply can't do it, do you see? They'll say you must have stolen them.

FIRST FISHERMAN. But if it isn't true!

CURRAO. But it is true! That's the only thing we're allowed to do! We're licensed thieves; thieving is our trade! (*To TOBBA.*) Didn't you steal? Then you're under arrest! Into the jug with you! (*To the policemen.*) Lock us up!

FIRST FISHERMAN (*to the policemen*). He's joking . . .

SECOND FISHERMAN. You can release him, on our word. We're ready to make a statement—

FIRST FISHERMAN. That we made him a gift of the trout and basket. He helped us pull in our net.

SECOND FISHERMAN. We brought him the basket of trout ourselves. Everyone here can bear witness to that.

ALL. It's true! It's true!

FIRST FISHERMAN. You don't need to stay. We'll come with you, if you like, to give our testimony.

(The policemen go away, followed by the two fishermen.)

QUANTERBA (*catching CROCCO by the jacket*). And you, you dirty, disgusting—

CURRAO (*pulling him brusquely back*). No! Let him alone!

LA SPERA. Disgust, yes, disgust . . . I'm disgusted with my life and you are disgusted with yours. My God, I'm trembling all over! Don't you feel something burning you up inside? What are you waiting for? Let's go. Let's go away, away from here, far away!

TRENTUNO. Far away? Where do you want to go?

LA SPERA. How do I know? Does that island really exist?

TRENTUNO. Island? What island?

LA SPERA. The one Tobba says is Heaven.

CIMINUDU. Penitence Island?

LA SPERA. Does it exist, I say?

FILACCIONE. It used to be there, sure enough . . .

FILICO. Who knows if it's there still!

BURRANIA. You'd go to that island?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Who's sentenced you to go there?

LA SPERA. Who? The whole society around us. Can't you see? We can't breathe any more.

CURRAO (*thoughtfully*). Back to the island!

LA SPERA. It would mean freedom!

FILACCIONE. There'd be freedom, all right, on the day it sank with you down to the bottom of the sea!

LA SPERA. And where are you here, living the way you do? Aren't you sunk? You'll never sink any deeper than you are now! But there, at least, you'll sink by an act of God, not at the hands of men even worse than yourself, who won't even let you come up to the surface for a breath of air! Lord help me, I have a feeling right here (*putting her hands over her stomach*) that I must draw a deep breath!

CURRAO (*looking around and repeating dreamily*). Back to the island! . . .

TRENTUNO. How do you mean? By virtue of sentencing ourselves to punishment?

TOBBA. It wouldn't be punishment if we set it ourselves.

QUANTERBA. But how could we get there? Aren't we mad?

LA SPERA. Tobba has a boat!

TRENTUNO. Oh, Tobba's boat! That's just the boat to take us on a venture like this!

LA SPERA. What do you mean?

QUANTERBA. Because it will take you to the bottom before you ever get there!

LA SPERA. That remains to be seen. It will be a test! Sink or swim; live or die!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. No thanks! You take the test if you insist!

FILLICO. And even if you get there, do you think they'll let you alone? They'll issue an evacuation order and come to take you away!

TOBBA. That's quite possible.

LA SPERA. But we'll shout them down!

CIMINUDU. What do you mean, shout them down? Haven't you noticed that they turn the other way?

CURRAO. There's nothing as deaf as the law.

LA SPERA. Can't they let us stay there at our own risk and peril? Didn't they sentence you to staying there before? They took you away only in order that you shouldn't die. Now, if you are willing to run the risk because anything is better than the life you're sentenced to lead here, if you tell them to their faces that you prefer death any day—

TOBBA. Others don't take into account a punishment that you inflict upon yourself. There's no punishment to it at all, they say, if they haven't had the satisfaction of inflicting it upon you. If they send you somewhere you don't want to go, then it's punishment. But if you go there of your own free will, it's your good pleasure.

LA SPERA. All right! Let's say that then! And say it out loud! It's our good pleasure to give up the life we've been leading! How can they refuse us, if no one here is willing to help us to something better? Let's go look for a better life there, even at the risk of dying for it. Why should they refuse us? There's land to be tilled, and the sea. Tobba has fishing nets. And I'll wait on you.

PAPIA (*sneering and rubbing his hands*). Oh, you will, will you? Then hurrah!

LA SPERA. How do you mean, you pig? I've had enough of my profession. That's what I want to get away from. I'll wait on you, cook your food, mend your clothes, look after you when you're ill, and work beside you. We'll lead a new life, all our own, a life built with our own hands!

QUANTERBA. I'll come!

TRENTUNO. So will I!

CURRAO (*to TOBBA*). Will you give us your boat?

TOBBA. It's yours!

FILLICO. Are we all ready?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Yes, all!

CURRAO. Easy there. Only those who want to work, who promise to stick it out, who are willing to do their share. Not those who just want a change of climate.

QUANTERBA. To work! To work!

PAPIA. Do you mean it? Real work? What with? Our hands?

TOBBA. With good will, if you have any. That's the only thing that counts.

TRENTUNO. Right! Good will finds a way and turns everything to good.

FILACCIONE. And what about Nuccio d'Alagna? Everything he has here is ours!

NUCCIO. Even the money?

FILACCIONE. We don't want to steal it. We want to buy rakes and hoes and fishing nets!

PAPIA. Can't you see Burrania and Bacchi-Bacchi pulling a plow?

FILLICO. No one's forcing you to come!

PAPIA. Of course not! I'm with you! I'm all for a new life!

BURRANIA (*to PAPIA, threateningly*). When you spoke of a plow, did you mean to call me an ox?

CURRAO. No more fighting!

TRENTUNO (*to BURRANIA*). Are you married? No? Then he didn't mean you were an old cock either.

(CROCCO comes back from outside with an ill-humored look on his face. CURRAO goes up, takes his hand, and pulls him into the room.)

CURRAO. Just in time! Come on in! (*He holds out one cheek.*) Here you are! Hit me! (*Seeing CROCCO hesitate in astonishment, he takes his other hand.*) Go to it! (*He hits himself with CROCCO's hand.*) Good! Now the other cheek! (*He holds it out to him.*)

CROCCO. What does this mean?

QUANTERBA. We're all off to the island!

FILLICO and TRENTUNO. To the island! To the island!

BURRANIA. In Tobba's boat!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Sink or swim; live or die!

BACCHI-BACCHI. It's all La Spera's idea.

IL RICCIO (*ironically*). A company of brothers! Hear! Hear!

LA SPERA (*to TOBBA, DORO, and CIMINUDU, while the others go on talking to CROCCO*). Now, let me go.

TOBBA. Where are you off to?

LA SPERA. To get my baby.

CIMINUDU. Why do you do that? Haven't you given him out to a wet nurse?

LA SPERA. You don't expect me to leave him here, do you? I'm taking him with me. (*She runs out the door.*)

CURRAO (*seizing NUCCIO by the jacket*). And you, you fool, don't give us away!

NUCCIO. Me? They murdered my son. I knew who did it, but I never breathed a word. They seduced my daughter, but I never breathed a word again . . . Do you really mean to go?

CURRAO. Yes, tomorrow night.

TRENTUNO. Every man-jack of us.

CURRAO. If no one gets cold feet before tomorrow comes.

NUCCIO. With Tobba's boat?

CURRAO. With Tobba's boat!

NUCCIO. To the island?

ALL. Yes, to the island!

NUCCIO. I'll give you provisions to take with you and buy your hoes and nets!

(A police officer, PALLOTTA, comes in, followed by two of his men in disguise. The chorus of "Hurrahs!" to NUCCIO D'ALAGNA comes to a sudden stop and there is complete silence.)

PALLOTTA (*to NUCCIO*). Still open at this hour?

NUCCIO. I was just going to close up.

PALLOTTA. You've already had one warning, mind you. If I find you open like this again I'll shut your place up for good. Out with you, every one!

TRENTUNO. We haven't broken the law—

PALLOTTA. Hold your tongue, there. Out with you! (*To TOBBA, while the others are going out.*) Do you really want to be mixed up with a crew like this?

TOBBA. They're just about my speed, Officer.

PALLOTTA. Your speed, you say? You're no longer speedy.

TOBBA. I don't run, these days, that's true.

(Wildly exultant, as if with some superhuman joy, LA SPERA comes onto the scene, holding her baby and alternately laughing and crying.)

LA SPERA. Oh, dear God, what is happening to me? Oh, God! Oh, God!

THREE OF THOSE PRESENT. What's the matter with her? What is she saying? What's happened?

CURRAO. The baby! Is he all right?

LA SPERA. It's me. It's me! I'm able to feed him! Mel! Mel!

CURRAO. You're giving him milk? What's that you say?

LA SPERA. A miracle, a miracle!

OTHERS PRESENT. What is it? Is she quite mad?

LA SPERA. No, I'm not mad! I don't know myself how it happened! I still can't believe it.

CURRAO. But what did happen? Tell us!

LA SPERA. A miracle, that's all! I can give milk to my baby. Yes, me! (*She presses the baby to her breast as if to protect him.*)

CURRAO. You can give it to him yourself? Now, after five months have gone by?

LA SPERA. I told him (*pointing to TOBBA*) that I was going to get the baby from the wet nurse. And when I said it something seemed to move inside me, a rush of heat in my head that darted down to my chest. I ran like a wild woman, like a flame, and on the way, in the next alley, at the first door, climbing the stairs, I fell down flat. I had no pain, but when I put up my hand my breasts were dripping. The milk had welled up in them all of a sudden, for this baby of mine! For this baby of mine! (*Again she makes a protective gesture, in which she seems to include herself as well as the child.*)

CIMINUDU (*almost speechless*). This is a miracle indeed!

ALL (*softly at first, then louder and louder*). A miracle! A miracle! A miracle!

TOBBA (*taking off his cap, speaking in a solemn tone*). A sign from God for all of us. A sign that He will be our guide . . . Yes, we must go . . . This very night. Let us kneel down and pray!

(*They all uncover their heads and kneel.*)

ACT ONE

The scene is the ground floor of a tumble-down house. Only the right wall is standing, with a window whose glass is missing. The rear wall has collapsed, revealing a deep green stretch of the island, with the sea in the distance aglow from the setting sun. The wall on the left is damaged only in the upper portion toward the rear, where it has been temporarily covered with a piece of painted sailcloth. A door in this wall leads to a room occupied by LA SPERA and her baby. The floor at the rear is still littered with fallen stones. And piled up along the sides of the room are pieces of furniture and various other objects saved from the ruins of other houses on the island: wardrobes with broken mirrors; sofas whose fine upholstery is now torn and discolored, with the stuffing coming out of it; chairs of every description; a couple of benches and small tables, kitchen utensils, etc.

As the curtain goes up we hear in the distance the refrain of a song sung by the new settlers as they come back from work.

On the stage are CIMINUDU, CROCCO, and PAPIA.

CIMINUDU is reclining on a mattress on the floor, leaning his back against the right wall; over his legs and pulled up to his chest is a rough cotton blanket and on his head is an old wool scarf. His face is pale and drawn, as if he had just come out of a mortal sickness. CROCCO is seated on a stone in the background, looking out.

PAPIA is in the center of the stage, lying flat on his stomach, propped up on his elbows, and holding his head in his hands.)

PAPIA (as the singing stops). So they can still sing, can they?

CROCCO. When a mad idea has got into your brain . . .

PAPIA (*to himself*). I can't believe it. I can't believe we're here. It must be a dream.

CROCCO. Tumble-down houses, empty fields (*After a pause.*) and the sea.

PAPIA. And this obsession—that one day I may not wake up and hear the sound of my own voice and know that I am alive.

CROCCO (*after another pause*). That's a pretty state of affairs, if it goes on like this. (*A pause. Then he turns brusquely and angrily around.*) Oh, drop that, will you!

PAPIA. Me? What am I doing?

CROCCO. What's that scratching noise?

PAPIA. I'm not scratching.

CROCCO. It must be a cricket there in the grass.

(*A pause.*)

PAPIA. Everything is in a daze. . . . It's as if time had come to a stop.

CROCCO. Is this any kind of a life, I ask you?

(*Another pause. QUANTERBA and TRENTUNO appear at the rear.*)

QUANTERBA. How's the patient?

CROCCO (*pointing to CIMINUDU*). There he is with a scarf on his head like a pious old woman when they pull out the sacrament.

TRENTUNO. Hello there, Ciminudul

PAPIA. Touch him and see if he's alive.

TRENTUNO (*astonished*). Touch whom?

PAPIA. Him! To see if he's really still there . . .

TRENTUNO. Are you crazy? (*Turning to CIMINUDU.*) How are you, Ciminudu?

CIMINUDU. Neither worse or better.

QUANTERBA. Cheer up then. If you're not worse, then there's nothing to worry about. How about La Spera?

CEMINUDU (*indicating with his head the door across the room*). She's in there with the baby.

TRENTUNO. Listen here—when she comes to give you your medicine and you feel the warmth of her body leaning over you . . . If I were sick, I tell you, that would cure me in a second.

(*He breaks into uncontrolled laughter. From far away and higher up comes the voice of DORO, singing a sea chantey.*)

CROCCO (*getting up in annoyance and muttering in a low voice*). When I look at the throat of that boy singing, I could knife him like a bloody sheep.

TRENTUNO. That way he wouldn't be La Spera's watchdog any longer.

QUANTERBA. But we're all her watchdogs. If they were gone we'd all have to knife each other.

PAPIA. Yes, but when the others are away, some of them in the fields and the rest fishing, he's always here beside her.

CROCCO. It would be the same thing even if he were gone. Haven't you thought of taking her by force, on the sly?

PAPIA. Haven't *you*?

CROCCO. Go to it, then! She's right in there. Take her, if you have the nerve.

TRENTUNO. That's right, go on! Set the good example!

PAPIA. You're joking . . .

TRENTUNO. No, we're not. We'll cover up for you.

QUANTERBA. She used to be there for the taking, didn't she?

CROCCO. She could be had for a song! And there were no takers! But now—

QUANTERBA. She's some sort of a queen!

TRENTUNO. A queen and a saint rolled into one!

PAPIA. With her baby!

CROCCO. And her king!

TRENTUNO. You'd like to be the king yourself, wouldn't you?

QUANTERBA. That's what's burning him up!

CROCCO. He's a king because she's his. And here we are, we scum of the earth, looking up to her like so many puppy dogs, and waiting for her to favor us with her presence—

QUANTERBA. In all her new-found beauty, unadorned as God made her . . .

CROCCO. And the cast-down, humble air with which she waits on us! No, it can't go on like this!

PAPIA (*angrily*). Either she belongs to us all, or else each one of us is entitled to his own woman.

TRENTUNO. Just go out and whistle for one! She came of her own free will. But how are you to find another woman who'll consent to live the way we do?

PAPIA. It means we can't go on ourselves, living like this, then!

QUANTERBA. Not the way you two live, that's certain. I don't know what got into you to come if you've no more spirit in you than this!

CROCCO. *I've* no spirit, you say? When you've—

QUANTERBA. I mean no spirit for this whole undertaking.

TRENTUNO. Because it's up to ourselves to work hard and improve our condition.

PAPIA. That's Currao's story!

CROCCO. He's done something for himself, that's sure. He seems to have his head in the clouds; he's walking on air.

PAPIA. And Fillico, have you seen him? He takes himself seriously now that he's a member of the council. He struts around like a turkey.

TRENTUNO. It's Tobba that makes me laugh. "I don't see how they can live in the city with the sight of only a scrap of sky between the rooftops above them—when here you can get drunk on it, lying in blessed silence on the grass." That's the way he talks! A bit of sky and he thinks he can speak with his Maker.

(DORO comes in with a paper of blackberries in his hand.)

DORO. What's this? A meeting?

CROCCO. Did you pick blackberries for the queen?

DORO. Is there anything wrong about that?

CROCCO. You swagger in here as if you were the master.

DORO. Am I supposed to ask your permission?

CROCCO. Yes, you are! (He knocks the blackberries to the ground.) That'll teach you!

DORO (without losing countenance; looking first up in the air and then down at the blackberries.) They weren't good, anyhow.

QUANTERBA. I wouldn't treat him like that, if I were you. Not if you're beginning to be sorry you came. He'll be the one to free us some day, when his father comes after him with his boats—

DORO. He's not coming—

QUANTERBA. And brings the customs guards with him to clear us out of here.

DORO. My father already knows I'm here.

QUANTERBA. Oh, he knows it, does he?

DORO. And he's leaving me here for a punishment. That's what he told Tobba when Tobba went ashore to speak to the officer. (He claps his hands with happiness.) So we're staying here; we're going to stay!

QUANTERBA. What did Tobba find out from the officer?

DORO. That they'd let us stay.

QUANTERBA. I can't believe it!

TRENTUNO. Tobba would have told us.

DORO. Perhaps he'll announce it tonight at the first meeting of the court. (To CROCCO.) You see, I didn't ask your permission to come in because it hasn't yet been decided whether I'm to ask him (pointing to PAPIA) or you. The court will decide this evening.

CROCCO (*pointing to the furniture and other things piled up at the left side of the room*). Meanwhile, this stuff is all mine.

PAPIA (*pointing to the things on the right*). And this is mine.

CROCCO (*threateningly*). By this evening you can move your stuff out.

PAPIA. We'll see. Either you move yours or I move mine.

DORO. Fine testimony from both of you to the "new life" you're leading! No sooner have you stepped off the boat than you start to loot the houses destroyed by the earthquake.

PAPIA. We're not the only ones, are we? Didn't everyone else do the same?

DORO. Oh, I know that. A fine start!

PAPIA. We didn't have a roof over our heads or anything to sleep on. So we just went after what we could find.

DORO. Everyone planning to grab a place for himself—

PAPIA. Exactly. I had my eye on this place here and I made straight for it.

CROCCO. But I had thought of it first.

PAPIA. Prove it!

CROCCO. Why, as soon as I saw you here I pulled you out and told you to get away, that the place was mine.

TRENTUNO. You'll have a hard job proving you thought of it before he did.

CROCCO. Who was more likely to think of it?

PAPIA. All right! You'll have your say and I'll have mine.

QUANTERBA. Wouldn't it be better if you went into partnership, like Trentuno and myself?

CROCCO. With him? I wouldn't even want to be next to him in a parade.

PAPIA. Same here!

TRENTUNO. With us it happened just the same way. Both of us had set our minds on the same spot. But instead of fighting over it, we decided to agree.

QUANTERBA. We've fixed up the house in a spirit of partnership and good company.

CROCCO. I came to this island long before he did.

PAPIA. What's precedence got to do with it?

CROCCO. It means that I saw this place before you.

PAPIA. That doesn't give you a right to it. In that case, the first man to step on the island could say, "This is mine," and push the others into the sea. I say you're getting out of here tonight. If you listen to reason, so much the better. If not, I'll put you out by force.

DORO. I always said that if you came along, we'd find the devil was among us.

CROCCO. Well, what do you expect? It takes a devil to affect a little angel like you.

DORO. You ought to follow the example of Burrania, who ran off to live by himself from the start. You can't get along with anyone.

TRENTUNO. Yes, Burrania. What's become of him?

DORO. I know. I went to look at him from a distance, without his being able to see me. He seemed to be quite mad, talking to the sea.

QUANTERBA. Talking to the sea?

CROCCO. Better talk to the sea than to people like you.

CIMINUDU. Good Lord, a little charity! Every loud word you say makes my head split open.

CROCCO. I've shown considerable charity, it seems to me, by keeping you here when you're sick.

PAPIA. Oh, so you're going to keep him, are you?

CROCCO. Yes, I am. And I'm leaving La Spera there because of her baby.

QUANTERBA. Oh, because of her baby?

TRENTUNO. If it weren't for the baby you wouldn't keep her, is that it?

CROCCO. We'll get around to discussing that, you can be sure. Never fear.

(*At this moment LA SPERA, with a transfigured expression on her face, comes in from the left.*)

PAPIA (*to LA SPERA*). Hear, hear! Listen to who's talking about charity now!

TRENTUNO. He says it's out of charity that he's keeping you here.

QUANTERBA. Ciminudu, because he's sick.

TRENTUNO. And you on account of the baby!

LA SPERA (*with kindly and genuine simplicity*). If he really thinks that, this place belongs to him.

CROCCO (*aggressively*). I don't *think*, I *know* that it belongs to me.

LA SPERA (*in the same manner as before*). So much the better. Then it *is* real charity.

PAPIA. You speak as if you didn't know the man!

LA SPERA. From now on that's the way we should all speak to each other.

PAPIA (*with astonishment and derision*). As if we didn't know each other?

LA SPERA. Mightn't it be true that by coming here and leading a new life we could all turn into something very different from what we were before?

PAPIA. But can't you see that he's just the same? That he wants to be recognized for what he always was?

CROCCO. A brute, eh?

PAPIA. And a hypocrite!

CROCCO. A hypocrite too?

PAPIA. Yes, a hypocrite. Because at the same time that you're trying to put something over on me—

CROCCO. I am?

PAPIA. Yes, you—at the same time, I say, you talk of charity—to her and to him. But I know what's back of this hypocrisy. You're putting forward this charity of yours in order to cover up the fact that I was the one to suggest that these two should remain here until it's decided whether the place is to be yours or mine.

CROCCO. You suggested it, did you? If you did, it was only because you were scared to death of what I might do to you if they weren't here to restrain me.

(QUANTERBA, TRENTUNO, and DORO all laugh.)

PAPIA. That may be. Anyhow, I don't brag of my charity.

CROCCO (*to LA SPERA, in a different tone, as if he wanted to know her opinion*). Speak up! Say something! At every word these fellows say I feel (*beating his chest*) a snake in my bosom. Speak up!

LA SPERA (*sorrowfully*). What can I say?

CROCCO. If you were in my place, what would you do?

LA SPERA. I'd lay my hand on his chest and say: "Do you want to stay here? Then stay!"

CROCCO. That's a good one! You'd just give in!

LA SPERA. That's my idea of a victory!

CROCCO. That's all very well for you to say. It wouldn't cost you anything.

LA SPERA. I know that it wouldn't cost me anything. I was speaking of you. If I were you, that's what I'd consider a victory.

CROCCO. To give up my lawful right?

LA SPERA. Yes, all the more if you are convinced that you have a greater right to stay here than he has.

PAPIA. That isn't true. He doesn't think so for a minute.

CROCCO. I do think so!

PAPIA. You just want to be a brute. You said so yourself.

CROCCO. You swine! You put those words into my mouth. (*Turning to LA SPERA.*) When I saw that other people were

trying to interfere and he was putting the whole thing up to them in order to isolate me, don't you see? (*To PAPIA.*) Why did you put it up to them, anyhow?

PAPIA. That's a good one! Because I was sure they'd say I was in the right.

CROCCO. No, that's not it. It was in order to ingratiate them and win them over to your side! If you were as sure of your rights as I am of mine, you wouldn't need the moral support of outsiders.

LA SPERA. Very well. But if you deny his rights just as he denies yours? What else is there to do but to leave it up to the others to decide which one of you has justice on his side?

PAPIA and the OTHERS. That's it! That's it! Hear, hear! Very good indeed! It's clear as daylight.

CROCCO. And who has given these others the right to decide between us?

LA SPERA. The very reason for believing yourself in the right, if it holds water.

CROCCO. Thank you! I know that for myself I don't need others to corroborate it.

LA SPERA. No. You know what you think, that's all.

QUANTERBA. Only someone outside can say if what you think is right.

TRENTUNO. Exactly. After they have weighed his claim against yours.

PAPIA. You're a party to the quarrel, like me. You can't stand up in judgment.

CROCCO. And how can others judge? By weighing the opposing claims? And on what scales do they weigh them? The weight of my claim is just what I say it is, and I say that its weight is the greater.

LA SPERA. Of course. But he says the same thing. What then?

CROCCO. Then the judges will either subtract something from the weight of my claim and add it to his, or else subtract

something from his and add it to mine. That's what they call justicel

LA SPERA. Because you insist that your claim is everything. And that can't be true. Of course if you were all alone in the world, either of you, that would be a different story. You would be the whole works, or he, as the case might be. But, does that make sense? None of us can be the whole works as long as there are others around him. Do you see? I have come to understand. Do you know what it means? It's to refuse to think only of one's self. That's why I just said to you: "Lay your hand on his chest and say: 'Do you want to stay here? Then stay!'" When you hold out your hands to grasp something, it always eludes you. But if you stretch them out in giving, then you will gather in everything that comes your way, and the lives of others will become your own.

(A strange violet shadow has fallen upon the room as the gloom of twilight envelops the distant horizon, heightening by contrast the bright green color of the island.

Between the dark red of the sunset and the violet shadow in the room come the yellow lights of two fishermen's lanterns carried by FILACCIONE and IL RICCIO, who are preceded by CURRAO, TOBBA, and FILLICO. Bringing up the rear are BACCHI-BACCHI and OSSO-DI-SEPPIA.)

FILACCIONE. Make way for the first session of the Court!

IL RICCIO. And the New Colonists' Council!

TOBBA. Come, come, no ceremony, no formality now. Let's keep it simple—

CURRAO (*imperiously*). No, we must be formal. You're no longer just yourself; you're here as a judge.

TRENTUNO. Then put him in a cap and gown!

CURRAO. He shall have them if we succeed in making ourselves into what we should.

QUANTERBA (*to TOBBA*). Listen. Is it true that you went to negotiate on the mainland for authorization for us to stay here?

CURRAO. Yes, it's true. And now you'll hear the terms of the authorization.

QUANTERBA. What? Are we under the authority of those on shore?

CROCCO (*scornfully*). The colony of free convicts!

TRENTUNO. Who took the responsibility of negotiating on our behalf?

CURRAO. Silence! I said that you would hear the terms. Just now the Court must be seated.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Quick, quick, a table and three chairs!

(*And he starts, together with BACCHI-BACCHI, to pick them out of the pile of objects at the left of the room.*)

CROCCO (*stepping in angrily*). Stop. Don't let anyone touch my things.

PAPIA. Never mind! Leave his things alone. Take them from over there. (*He points to the right.*) I'll contribute the table and chairs!

CROCCO (*to LA SPERA*). Now, do you see what sort he is? You who say that justice—

FILICO. Do you think we'll favor him because he's provided us with seats?

CROCCO. No. (*To LA SPERA.*) You should learn to take choice into consideration too. (*To OSSO-DI-SEPPIA and BACCHI-BACCHI.*) You might have started out in his direction (*pointing to PAPIA*) and have taken his chairs, in which case I should have called out: "Take them from my side." Then I should have been the one to contribute the chairs. . . . But the Court doesn't really need to sit down. There you are. (*To LA SPERA.*) I'll do what you said. (*To PAPIA.*) Come over here.

PAPIA (*approaching him uncertainly*). What do you want?

CROCCO. Come here! (*Laying his hand on PAPIA's chest.*) Do

you want to stay here? Then stay! I'll leave you everything and go away.

CURRAO. Where are you going?

CROCCO. Wherever you say.

PAPIA. You're leaving the house to me, and the land with it?

CROCCO. And that stuff over there too. It's all yours.

FILLICO. Don't you want any of it?

CROCCO. Not a thing!

PAPIA. So you surrender, do you?

LA SPERA. No! That's not it at all. Didn't you understand? He asked you if you wanted to stay, and told you to go ahead and do it. He's going away without taking a thing.

CROCCO. I'll do whatever you say. Here I am. I'll go to whoever will take me. (*At his unexpected demonstration of humility all those present look at him, and then at one another, with suspense and uncertainty. There is a slightly bitter and disdainful smile on CROCCO's lips as he turns to LA SPERA.*) You see? Nobody wants me.

TOBBA. Because no one can believe that you are giving up everything for nothing in return.

CROCCO. Nothing, I tell you. What more can I say? Settle where you want me to go and I'll go; what I'm to do and I'll do it. Ready for anything, ready to do the best I can. I'll lend a hand wherever it's needed. Repair jobs, or whatever there is to do. (*To TOBBA.*) I could rebuild that wall over there for you, for instance. Or work the land, if you prefer. Or fish. Whatever you say.

CURRAO (*going forward and looking him up and down*). With what end in view?

CROCCO (*meeting CURRAO's stare*). If you're asking me that you must know the answer.

CURRAO (*promptly*). I do. (*In a different tone.*) And do you think it will be an easy job?

CROCCO. No. You're the one that's got it easy. (*He points to LA SPERA.*) You have her. And you're the boss.

CURRAO. I'm the boss, you say?

CROCCO. All the rest of us are your servants, at your beck and call.

CURRAO. Which one of you can say that? Haven't I been the servant of you all? The first to give, the last to receive?

TRENTUNO. True enough!

THE OTHERS. It's true! It's true!

CURRAO. We came here to lead our own lives.

CROCCO. Yes, every man for himself and no one taking orders from another.

CURRAO. And who's giving you orders?

CROCCO. Haven't you this very evening set up a court? I came here to get away from the law—

CURRAO (*promptly*). From the law laid down by others. Because you and I and the rest of us had put ourselves outside the law. We felt that it was an imposition of society upon us. But now the restraint of that law is gone. Here the only law is yours.

CROCCO. Mine?

CURRAO. The law you must make for yourself.

CROCCO. I don't want to make any law.

CURRAO. But you've got to. Call it by another name, if you will—

TOBBA (*forcefully*). But just the same it's a law!

CURRAO. A law before which we are equal, your law and mine; a law that we impose upon ourselves because we see the justice and necessity of it. A law to regulate the work that each one of us must do, according to his capacities, in order to cooperate with the rest. No one is laying down this law but yourself. In order that you may have a fair return for the work you give.

CROCCO. But I don't want anything in return. I've told you that.

TOBBA. Then go off on your own, like Burrania.

FILLICO. But if you want to stay with us, you must join in what we do.

CURRAO. Do you think that you can be self-sufficient?

CROCCO. Can you tell me what it is you have that I haven't got?

CURRAO. Nothing. That is, if you can do what I can do.

CROCCO. I'm stronger than you are, I tell you.

CURRAO. That remains to be seen. And even if you are, does that mean that you want to overcome us by force? If you're in the wrong and I'm here with the others on my side, what good will it do for you to be the stronger? If we all stand together, we shall win.

CROCCO. I mean if we stand up man to man.

CURRAO. Then you could put me down? But you'd always have to fear that I might take revenge. If you want your triumph to be complete, you must kill me.

FILLICO. Then we'd take revenge into our hands and kill Crocco.

TOBBA. Because we can't allow a man's life to be at the mercy of whoever wants to suppress it.

LA SPERA. That's fair enough, can't you see?

CROCCO. No. It's still a question of strength in numbers turned against one man.

CURRAO (*to LA SPERA*). Let me talk. I know what it is. It's because I have you. That's the whole trouble. (*To CROCCO.*) You'd like to have her yourself, wouldn't you? And by what means? By force?

CROCCO. I didn't say that!

CURRAO. What do you say, then? You haven't brought up any argument except that you're the stronger.

CROCCO. I said that you had it easy.

CURRAO. Yes, because I have her, is that it? Very well. But do I have it so easy, after all? I let her look after everyone, including yourself. I let her keep the fire going and take care of that sick man. I know that she can't wait on all of you, and I love her; I might insist that she look after no one but me.

CROCCO. And how do you know that I wouldn't do the same thing if she were mine?

CURRAO. You! You'd give her so freely? When what you are driving at is to take her away from me. Your idea is to give in order to get something in return. You want her for a reward. . . . And then you say you want nothing! (*All those present except LA SPERA laugh at CROCCO's expense.*)

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA (*with enjoyment*). Take her if you can!

IL RICCIO. There she is!

FILACCIONE. You've only to stretch out your hand!

TRENTUNO. There's nothing to it!

LA SPERA (*proudly*). That's enough! I can't have you humiliating him.

CURRAO. Are you coming to his defense?

LA SPERA. I'm defending myself, because you're humiliating me, too, by speaking of me as a prize to go to the strongest among you, or to whoever gives the most for me. As if I had no right to find a pleasure of my own in waiting upon you all, the way I do!

CROCCO. Yes. As if he too were not giving in order to get something in return. (*To CURRAO.*) You let her look after us in order to enjoy our respect and consideration!

LA SPERA (*to CURRAO*). You must find another way to convince him. I can belong to you all, the way I do now, just because I belong to one man, the man of my own choice. Whereas the way I used to belong to you all, I really belonged to nobody, not even to myself!

(*Suddenly BACCHI-BACCHI, who has been looking out from the back of the room over the island, begins to shout.*)

BACCHI-BACCHI. Look! Look! Who's that running down there?
Look!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Burranical It's Burrania coming back! Bur-
ranial

TRENTUNO. Yes, it's Burranical

QUANTERBA. He's running as if the devil were at his heels.

FILLICO (*to CROCCO*). Do you see? He left us because he had
the same notion as you, and after nine days, here he is again.

PAPIA. Here he comes!

FILACCIONE. He looks stark mad!

DORO (*waving his arms*). He's groping with his hands, like
this!

QUANTERBA, TRENTUNO, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Burranical Burranical
Burranical

(*BURRANIA bursts in from the rear, his face chalky white and
his eyes wild with terror.*)

BURRANIA. The island's sinking! The island's sinking into the
sea!

THE OTHERS. What?—What?—No!—How's that?—What are
you saying?—Sinking?—The island?—Into the sea?

BURRANIA. I saw it! I saw it with my own eyes. It's sinking,
I tell you—sinking, sinking!

THE OTHERS. No! What did you see? Are you crazy?

BURRANIA. I saw it starting to sink, do you hear? I could feel
it sinking! I heard a tremendous noise, as if the sea were
sizzling! Yes, I tell you!

CURRAO. But where? And when? None of us have heard it!

BURRANIA. Yes! Over there! I saw black! And the earth
trembled! That light! (*He points outside.*) Look at that light
out there! That light!

TOBBA. It's the light of the sunset!

BURRANIA. No, no! Come and see! We're sinking, sinking
into the sea! The island is going down! To the beach! To the
beach!

(*All those present except LA SPERA and CROCCO are overcome by panic, and though they shout, "No! No!" they dash outside and disappear, with a confusion of voices, in the direction of the beach.*)

CIMINUDU (*struggling to his feet in terror and trying to follow the rest*). Don't leave me here alone! Oh, my God, don't leave me here alone! (*He runs after them.*)

LA SPERA. My baby! My baby!

CROCCO. I'll get him!

LA SPERA. No! I'll go!

CROCCO (*holding her back*). But don't you see that nothing is moving at all! It's just the delirious imagination of a hungry madman! Come along, now. We'll get the baby. (*And he starts to follow her into the next room.*)

LA SPERA (*suddenly holding back*). No. What is it you want?

CROCCO (*taking hold of her*). You! I want you! Yes—

LA SPERA (*struggling free*). Let me go!

CROCCO. You've got to be mine!

LA SPERA. Let go, I tell you!

CROCCO. No! Mine, mine! . . .

LA SPERA. I'll die first! Take care! I'm going to shout!

CROCCO. You'll not get away! I'll have you, whatever the cost! Come! Come in here!

LA SPERA. I won't! No! Let go! I won't do it!

CROCCO. Why not? I've had you before, haven't I?

LA SPERA. Let go, I say! I'm calling for help!

(*DORO comes in from the rear, and after a moment of astonishment, rallies to LA SPERA's defense.*)

DORO. You swine! Let her go! Let her go!

CROCCO (*letting LA SPERA go and turning against DORO*). You, you pup! Always in the way! But I'll settle you! (*He goes for the boy's throat.*)

LA SPERA (*rushing over to pull him back*). No! Don't touch him! Don't you dare!

(*From close by, outside, come loud laughter and shouts of mockery. CROCCO, thwarted in his rage, stands still for a moment in perplexity, and then shouts threateningly at DORO and LA SPERA.*)

CROCCO. Wait for me! Just you wait! (*He disappears in the rear.*)

LA SPERA (*to DORO, maternally*). What did he do? Did he hurt you?

DORO. Nothing! Nothing at all! I want to see where he's running!

LA SPERA (*holding him back*). No! Stay here! And don't say a word. (*She pulls herself together.*)

DORO. Jailbird! Brute force, eh? When a man's born bad—

LA SPERA. No one's born bad, Doro! It's only when a man can't find a way—no matter how hard he tries—to be good to his fellows . . . And no one helps him to learn how! (*She weeps.*)

DORO. But even with you—Don't you see? . . . (*In surprise.*) Are you crying?

LA SPERA (*drying her tears*). They didn't know how to put it across to him . . .

(*Still laughing and joking, there reappear on the scene BUR-
RANIA, FILACCIONE, BACCHI-BACCHI, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, QUANTERBA,
CURRAO, TOBBA, FILLICO, and IL RICCIO, who is holding up CIMI-
NUDU. Only TRENTUNO is missing.*)

FILACCIONE. Starvation, that was it, starvation!

BACCHI-BACCHI. It was all a mirage.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA (*laughing*). He saw it sinking! He thought he saw it sinking!

QUANTERBA. And was the moon sinking too? Tell me that!

CURRAO (*to LA SPERA*). Give him something to eat.

TOBBA. As long as we are without sin, the island will never go down!

PAPIA. Then it's decided, is it, that this house and land belong to me?

CURRAO (*looking around*). Where's Crocco?

FILLICO. He was here. He didn't go out with us.

LA SPERA. He's gone now.

QUANTERBA. Yes, I saw him running in the direction of the beach.

LA SPERA. You wouldn't have him and so he's gone away. You might have taken him up when he gave in to you.

CURRAO. But didn't you see what was his motive?

FILLICO. We all saw it as plain as day.

LA SPERA. Yes, he did it for me. (*To CURRAO.*) You should have said to him—

CURRAO (*brusquely, in annoyance*). Yes, I know, exactly what *you* said!

LA SPERA. But you left it for me to say and so he thought, quite correctly, that I was defending him against you, and as soon as you went away—

CURRAO. What did he do?

DORO. Nothing! I got here in time!

CURRAO. He attacked you, did he? By God, where is he?

LA SPERA. Never mind. He's gone.

CURRAO. Are you still standing up for him?

LA SPERA. No, I'm standing up for myself . . . when you talk this way. I can stand up against you just the way I stood up against him. Never fear.

QUANTERBA. One's come back and another's gone! What do you say?

FILACCIONE. He'll come back, too, you can be sure of that. It's no fun to live alone.

CURRAO. And we've still so much to do! This is only the beginning, and it's all up to us. Think how wonderful it is that we should be building up a life here with our own hands—with nothing at all, with whatever we can find. Building it up

from the foundation and making it into what we will. . . . Already the earth is green!

BACCHI-BACCHI (*with kindly irony*). Yes, we've good air—
PAPIA. No wine!

OSSO-DI-SEPPLA. No women!

QUANTERBA. We can get up and go to bed with the chickens!

FILACCIONE. We'll have good health to spare!

TOBBA. Don't think too much, that's all. Just work! Listen to me; I've never wasted time thinking. . . . Is the ground to be hoed? Then hoe the ground. Are there seeds to be sown? Then sow them. Have you nets? Throw them out and pull them in. Work, work! Work for the sake of working; work for the love of it, without counting up what you have done. Then the day will end before you know it. (*He lays his hands on QUANTERBA'S chest.*) You'll throw yourself wearily down to sleep, and when you look up at the stars they'll seem to be smiling at you as if you were a child.

OSSO-DI-SEPPLA (*with mock sorrow*). But, good Lord, a glass of wine!

BACCHI-BACCHI. And a woman's smile. . . .

CURRAO. We'll replant the grapevines as fast as we can. And it's up to us to work so hard that every one of us can have a woman of his own.

(*CIMINUDU, who has been standing to the rear, feels suddenly faint; his face turns white as a sheet and he crumples up just as someone comes to support him.*)

BURRANIA (*holding him up*). Ciminudul Ciminudul

IL RICCIO (*helping to hold him*). Lord, he's falling!

SOME OF THE OTHERS (*turning around*). What is it? What's wrong? Ciminudu? Is he sick?

LA SPERA (*coming over*). Quickly, lay him down. Hold him . . . Lay him gently down here.

DORO. Good God, how white he is!

OTHERS (*in low voices*). He's dead! He's dead!

LA SPERA. No, his pulse is still beating.

QUANTERBA (*touching his forehead*). He's already cold!

LA SPERA (*pointing to her room*). Doro, go get some woollens in there, to lay over his chest. . . . Hurry . . . My shawl . . . Yes, my shawl! It's on the baby.

(DORO runs to obey. Meanwhile TRENTUNO's voice is heard outside).

VOICE OF TRENTUNO. Help! Help! Come quickly!

OTHERS. What is it?—More trouble?—Trentuno?—He's calling for help.

LA SPERA. Quiet! Quiet!

VOICE OF TRENTUNO (*breathless, from closer by*). The boat! The boat! Come! Help! Help!

OTHERS. The boat? What's he shouting?

(*General agitation.*)

LA SPERA. Quiet! This poor fellow's dying!

TRENTUNO (*coming in, distraught*). Crocco has unchained the boat! He's stolen it and run away! We're done for!

CURRAO (*running with the others to the rear*). The boat?

OTHERS. The thief!—The murderer!—What shall we do?—We're cut off completely!

TRENTUNO. See! There he is! In that shaft of moonlight on the water!

OTHERS. Yes, yes!—There he is!—He's raising the sail!—The new sail!

PAPIA. This is his revenge!

QUANTERBA. We can't get back to land!

FILICO. We should never have brought him with us! I said that all along!

OTHERS. What will become of us?—What shall we do?—Cut off from the world!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. This is the last straw! The last straw!

CURRAO (*coming back with TRENTUNO toward TOBBA, who*

has not moved from the side of CIMINUDU). The boat, Tobba, did you hear? Your boat!

TRENTUNO (*stopping abruptly when he sees CIMINUDU on the floor*). What's this? Is he dead?

LA SPERA (*leaning over the dying man*). No . . . no . . . (*To DORO, who has come back with the shawl.*) Give it to me quickly. There, over his heart . . . Stand aside, all of you. . . .

TRENTUNO (*stepping back with the rest*). He seems to be dead. . . . Just like that, all of a sudden . . . How did it happen?

QUANTERBA. He ran out along with the rest of us. Then he came back and was standing there listening, when suddenly his knees gave way.

FILLICO. That swinel (*He points outside where CROCCO has gone.*)

TOBBA. Forget about him!

CURRAO. But what shall we do without the boat?

TOBBA. What's that? We'll do without it, that's all.

FILLICO. You always say things are easy! But we won't be able to fish!

TOBBA. Oh, yes, we will!

QUANTERBA. How?

TOBBA (*motioning to everyone to talk quietly on account of the dying man*). There's wood and ropes. We'll make rafts.

FILLICO. But what about supplies? No ships come this way.

TOBBA. We've still got supplies. Bread won't be lacking.

CURRAO. That's right. Perhaps it's better this way . . . with only our own hands to rely on.

TOBBA. And God's help.

LA SPERA (*raises her head, and after a moment of silence, speaks softly*). He's dead.

(*They all lean over to look, and bare their heads; some kneel.*)

ACT TWO

A rocky promontory of the island. A rough road leading to it rises from right to left at the front of the stage and then turns steeply back down to the beach below. Beyond the promontory are endless stretches of sea and sky.

At the front of the stage, on the left, are the remains of a house built against the highest summit of rock. The caved-in roof has been repaired after a fashion, and there is an open green door, wrenched off its hinges and still twisted as a result of the earthquake.

As the curtain rises, a clamor of excited and confused voices comes from the right. Immediately afterward, gesticulating and running up the road in order to look out to sea, CURRAO, TOBBA, FILLICO, QUANTERBA, TRENTUNO, and PAPIA, followed by LA SPERA, with her baby wrapped in her shawl, come upon the scene.)

CURRAO. Fishing boats from our own harbor! Look, four of them! From here you can see them plainly.

QUANTERBA. Perhaps they are drifting . . . after the hurricane of last night.

PAPIA. No, Crocco must be mixed up in it somehow. This must be his revenge.

FILLICO. Revenge? Let him land if he can!

TRENTUNO. As God is my witness, they shan't set foot on this shore!

CURRAO (*to* TRENTUNO). Go call everyone together. Get ready for them with stones up here and with boards and poles on the beach. Hurry!

(TRENTUNO runs out to the right.)

TOBBA. Four boatloads of them, boys! It won't be easy to hold them off!

CURRAO. But they're afloat on the water and we're on dry land!

TOBBA. What if they're armed?

CURRAO. Stones! (*To QUANTERBA and FILLICO.*) Stones!

PAPIA (*running with the others to collect more stones in front of the house*). Yes, stones, stones!

CURRAO. Get the biggest you can find.

PAPIA (*picking up one with both hands*). Here's the sort we need!

CURRAO. Good! Get more of those!

FILLICO. We'll smash the invaders to pieces!

CURRAO. Bring up as many as you can. But there are more of them up here. (*To the three men coming up the road.*) You can throw them from here with all the strength you've got.

TOBBA (*looking out to sea on the right*). Here they are! Here they are! What a crowd they've got aboard!

CURRAO. We'll defend ourselves to the last drop of blood!

PAPIA. By God, he can't put this over!

FILLICO. But our fellows—where are they? If they delay much longer, it will be too late.

QUANTERBA (*looking toward the right*). Here they are! They're coming! (*He shouts and motions to them with his hands.*) Here, here! Hurry, hurry! Everyone improvise a weapon of his own.

CURRAO (*noticing the presence of LA SPERA*). What do you want? What are you doing here, with the baby? Go away!

LA SPERA. Let me stay beside you.

CURRAO. No, I can't have that. They may be armed, didn't you hear?

QUANTERBA (*to PAPIA, looking out to sea*). Look, there's a strip of red. As if they were hoisting a flag.

TOBBA (*to LA SPERA*). This is no place for you with the child. Better go along!

PAPIA (*to QUANTERBA*). That's no flag. I see a streak of something yellow, too, on the second boat.

LA SPERA. What can you do against so many?

CURRAO. You'll see!

LA SPERA. How will you stop them?

CURRAO. You'll see, you'll see!

LA SPERA. If they can't land here, they'll look for another landing.

CURRAO. In the meantime they're here, aren't they?

QUANTERBA. Crocco knows that this is the best place to land.

LA SPERA. And whose right is involved?

CURRAO (*angrily*). Whose right? Ours or theirs?

LA SPERA. The island isn't exclusively ours, is it?

CURRAO. Yes, by God, it is!

TOBBA. They'd never have come here on their own initiative.

CURRAO. They got the courage to come from the risk that we ran; the trials that we endured. That's why the island is ours.

FILLICO. And we shan't let them take it from us.

(*DORO comes on, rejoicing, from the right.*)

DORO. Put down those stones!

LA SPERA. What? Are those your father's boats?

DORO. Yes, I recognize them. Perhaps he's come for me!

FILLICO. With a fleet of four boats to carry you home?

QUANTERBA. Like a king's son?

DORO. Perhaps he's bringing gifts. . . .

(*TRENTUNO comes in from the right with a long pole.*)

TRENTUNO. What do you mean by gifts? Crocco's in the first boat. I saw him with my own eyes.

(*FILACCIONE, also armed with a pole, comes up.*)

FILACCIONE. Yes, he's egging them on and telling them where's the best place to land.

(IL RICCIO, BACCHI-BACCHI, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, and BURRANIA, all with poles or sticks, come onto the stage.)

PAPIA. We must slaughter him! The coward!

CURRAO. Go down to the beach with the poles. But not all of you! (To BURRANIA.) Give me this one of yours and you stay here to throw stones. (To PAPIA.) If they manage to land—

PAPI. We'll draw our knives, never fear!

CURRO. A fight to the finish! It's either we or they! Let's go on down to the beach.

(He goes down to the beach, followed by TRENTUNO, FILACCIONE, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, BACCHI-BACCHI, and IL RICCIO.)

TOBBA. Here's the first boat!

PAPIA (raising his arm). Ready with the stones!

(On the lower right side of the stage appear the triangular point of the bright red sail of the first boat. And we hear the confused shouts of the new arrivals and those of the settlers who wish to block their landing.)

VOICE OF CURRAO. Get away! Get away! No one's landing here!

VOICE OF TRENTUNO. Courage, boys! Let them have it! Up and at them!

VOICE OF FILACCIONE. Back! Go back! I'll run this through your belly!

VOICE OF OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Back to the sea, you swine! We'll settle you!

VOICE OF BACCHI-BACCHI. Keep off the shore! Don't come any closer. Get out!

VOICE OF IL RICCIO. Throw the stones, up there!

(At the same time come voices from the boats.)

VOICES OF THE SAILORS. Friends! We're friends! We're not here to hurt you! Let us land!

(The point of another sail glides in.)

VOICE OF MASTER NOCIO. Peace, peace! I've come to get my son!

VOICE OF MITA. Dorol! Dorol! It's us!

VOICE OF CROCCO. Here's Mita! We have women here! Women!

VOICES OF THE SETTLERS (*from below, ceasing their resistance*). Ah, women, women! (PAPIA, QUANTERBA, and BURRANIA *throw their stones on the ground and run exultantly down to join the others on the beach.*) Women! Women! Women!

FILLICO (*to TOBBA*). There's no holding them now! They've brought women along!

TOBBA. Good-by, peace!

VOICES FROM THE BEACH. A parade! Carry the women in triumph!

TRENTUNO. Hurrah for Marella!

QUANTERBA. Hurrah for La Dia!

OTHERS (*in chorus*). On our shoulders! On our shoulders!

IL RICCIO. Here, Nela, let me carry you!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Up here, Sidora!

OTHERS (*in chorus*). Hurrah! Hurrah! A triumphal march!

CROCCO. And Mita too, in triumph!

(And they come up from the beach, shouting, carrying the flashily clothed women in their arms, laughing and trembling with mock joy and astonishment, as if they were carrying out some ritualistic rape.)

TRENTUNO (*with Marella in his arms, fighting over her with BACCHI-BACCHI*). This one's mine! She's mine! Get away! You can't have her!

BACCHI-BACCHI. She's mine, I say! Let her go!

MARELLA. Let go of me, both of you, you wild men! Put me down on the ground!

VOICES OF THE SAILORS. Hurrah for Marella!

BACCHI-BACCHI. I had her in my arms first! Let her go!

TRENTUNO. But you couldn't hold her! Get out of the way, I tell you!

VOICES OF THE SAILORS. Hurrah! Hurrah!

(The first group—consisting of these two men and one woman—surrounded by sailors from the crews, quarreling, laughing, and cheering, after they have come up the road, go down again to the right. Another group from the beach follows.)

IL RICCIO *(with Nela in his arms)*. Here's the real queen! Queen Nela! Queen Nela with a crown on her head!

NELA. No, no. That's enough, you madmen! You'll make me fall! You'll make me fall!

IL RICCIO. No, you'll not fall! Don't be afraid! Not if I'm holding you!

VOICES OF THE SAILORS. Hurrah! Hurrah! In triumph! Higher and higher!

(And they disappear on the right, succeeded by QUANTERBA with LA DIA in his arms.)

QUANTERBA. Dial Divine in name and deed! Hurrah for Dial! Hurrah for Dia! The goddess Dia! Divine—and mine!

LA DIA. Let me go! Let me go! My head's reeling! Put me down!

(She goes out to the right. Up from the beach comes MITA, followed by CROCCO.)

MITA. Dorol Dorol Where are you?

CROCCO *(trying to take hold of her)*. Come along, let yourself be carried in triumph too!

MITA *(evading him)*. No, no!

DORO (*who has been down in front of the tumble-down house, leaping up over the rocks to come to his sister's defense*). Leave my sister alone! Don't you dare touch her!

MITA (*embracing her brother*). Dorol Dorol We have come, do you see?

CROCCO. Come to free you, silly boy! Come to make you a little king! But your sister falls to me! (*Tries to take hold of her again.*)

MITA (*pushing him away*). Nol Nol Stop it, I tell you!

DORO. Get away from here, or else, by God . . .

(DORO starts to attack him. MASTER NOCIO arrives from the beach, followed by BURRANIA, FILACCIONE, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, PAPIA, and some sailors.)

MASTER NOCIO. What's this? Lay off, there! (*To CROCCO.*) Are you trying to touch my daughter?

CROCCO. It's all a game, Master Nocio.

MASTER NOCIO. I don't want anyone playing such games with my daughter. (*To DORO.*) We have a score to settle with you, young whippersnapper!

CROCCO (*pointing to LA SPERA, who stands, somewhat taken aback, with the baby wrapped in her shawl, between TOBBA and FILLICO, in front of the house below.*) Look! Look down there! He's done nothing but cling to the skirts of that filthy woman! (*With an obscene leer.*) The plaster saint! Look at her! The plaster saint!

FILACCIONE (*leering along with the rest*). Yes, look at her! Our queen!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. And to think that we were wild about that bundle of rags!

PAPIA. Your reign is over!

BURRANIA. You can put out the candle that we kept burning for you alone!

CROCCO. Dirty wretch! Slut!

DORO. You cowards, you!

TOBBA. She's been a sister to us all! (*To MASTER NOCIO.*) And a mother to your son!

FILLICO. Cowards!

CROCCO (*to TOBBA*). You can have her, you drooling old fool!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. We've all the women we want!

PAPIA. And you've gone back to being what you were before!

CROCCO. Slut!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA (*spitting*). Pugh! Go wash your face!

FILACCIONE. Pugh!

FILLICO. The more they desired her the more they despise her now!

TOBBA. God will punish you for this!

LA SPERA. Never mind what they say! I was offended by their desire, but their scorn doesn't offend me at all. (*To the mockers.*) And don't think I'm proud, either. No, on the contrary, I know that I am being humbled; that through you, God is humbling me. Better so. Yes, it's better that I should be spit upon and despised and humiliated.

(From the beach comes a medley of voices.)

SAILOR'S VOICES. Get him! Get him!

Lay hold of him! Don't let him go!

Knife him! Knife him!

Stick him with his own knife!

Throw him in the sea!

Yes, tie him up and throw him in the sea!

In the sea! In the sea!

Go to it! First knock him flat on the ground!

VOICE OF CURRAO. You shan't take me alive! Can't you see I'm unarmed? . . . Cowards! So many against one! No, you shan't tie me!

(MITA, MASTER NOCIO, and DORO run to look down from the cliff.)

MITA. Who's that shouting?

DORO. It's the voice of Currao!

LA SPERA. Oh, God, No! What are they doing to him? What are they doing?

MITA. They're trying to tie him up! No! No! He's defending himself! No! No! Lay down that knife!

LA SPERA. Save him, Doro! Save him, save him!

CROCCO. There's your king for you! (*He shouts down at the beach.*) Cut him to bits!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. They're going to truss him up and throw him into the sea!

LA SPERA. No! No! Run, Doro, run! Save him, for the love of Heaven!

DORO. Let him go! Let him go, you murderers! (*To his father.*) You call to them! You order them to let him go! They're going to throw him into the water! Don't you see? (*And he rushes down toward the beach.*)

MASTER NOCIO (*in a loud voice*). Hey, there! I order you to let him go! We didn't come to do any harm! Come up here, all of you, and let's put things in order before nightfall! Come on up here!

TOBBA (*to LA SPERA and FILLICO*). Let us go down there and join him. (*To LA SPERA.*) Don't be afraid!

(*TOBBA, LA SPERA, and FILLICO start up over the cliff in order to go down to the beach. As they pass through the crowd of mockers, the latter begin again to sneer and make mock bows and salutations.*)

FILACCIONE. Your dethroned majesty!

BURRANIA. Saint without candles!

PAPIA. What's your price, little one?

FILLICO. Shame on you! She has the baby in her arms!

CROCCO. Oh, so it's you, you plucked rooster? You'll not wave your tail feathers again!

TOBBA. Come along, Fillico. Don't pay any attention!

(While these three go away, half a dozen sailors, answering MASTER NOCIO'S call, come with DORO up from the beach.)

MASTER NOCIO. Come along! And those who wish to be at peace with us will follow. Where are the others? *(To DORO.)* You lead the way.

(He goes out to the right with MITA, DORO, and the sailors. CROCCO, BURRANIA, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, FILACCIONE, and PAPIA are left on the stage.)

CROCCO. Well, what do you say?

BURRANIA. Snakel

CROCCO. I had quite an idea, didn't I?

FILACCIONE. But you brought too big a crowd! Too many of them!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. No, the more the merrier!

FILACCIONE. I've lost the habit—

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. And you feel all mixed up, is that it?

PAPIA. No one's going to take anything away from me!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. I don't suppose they'll all stay. . . .

BURRANIA. And if any one of us wants to go away, we have four boats at our disposal. . . .

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. But there's land enough for everybody, after all.

BURRANIA. It may be more agreeable to stay here, now that there are more of us.

CROCCO. I had a notion that very soon you'd all perish from boredom.

BURRANIA. But how did you persuade Master Nocio?

PAPIA. With his son here? That was easy!

CROCCO. Yes, his son. But it wasn't just on account of his son, although of course that was the main attraction.

PAPIA. If he wanted to get him back, he had either to come for him himself or send others to fetch him.

CROCCO. He could have always called in the police, and then he wouldn't have run the risk of having you resist him.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Your brightest idea was to bring the women!

BURRANIA. Yes, the minute we saw them in the boats—

CROCCO. I knew it! But it was no easy job (*turning to PAPIA*) to persuade their fathers and husbands and brothers to bring them along. I had to tell them the island was an earthly paradise.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Yes, after the intrusion of original sin!

CROCCO. I told them the sea was teeming with fish, that you had only to scratch the ground for it to yield you a harvest, that there was wonderful sunlight and a life of freedom, lived however you wanted to live it!

PAPIA. But if you haven't the means, how are you to enjoy your freedom?

CROCCO. That's just it. He has the means. And we shall make use of them. It's up to us to do whatever we will, as long as we stand together. Listen to me. He's just a stupid fellow—he's made money with the fishing fleet his father left him without even knowing how he was doing it. But he's ambitious too, and now he wants to make this into an enterprise of his own. You can imagine in what glowing colors I painted it to him! He'll run the thing, but in name only. If he wants to hold undisputed sway, he'll need our help against those who got here before him and claim to rule over the island. And so I have an idea. Listen to me. We'll be the bodyguard. The five of us. And Il Riccio, to make six, if he wants to join us.

PAPIA. What do you mean by bodyguard?

FILACCIONE. His personal guards?

CROCCO. To protect him and support the new government.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. I see! Police! That's it! Yes, police! Of course I'll join! What luck! I can hardly believe it!

FILACCIONE. Me too! Me too!

CROCCO. But don't mention the word police, for the love of

Heaven! Say bodyguards, or just plain guards. I'll convince him that he needs something of the sort, and then we'll have a soft time of it, watching over his highness. But we must get old Tobba on our side.

PAPIA. How can we do that? You know the kind he is!

CROCCO. By convincing him that it's in order to keep the peace. We must have him with us, come what may, because he has an understanding with the police on the mainland.

FILACCIONE. We'll make him our leader! Our generall

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Wonderfull Red trousers and a wooden sword and a plume on his cap! Leave the plume to me!

CROCCO. No joking, now. No joking. We've got a serious job to do. . . . To set up a conspiracy—

FILACCIONE. A conspiracy?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. What for?

FILACCIONE. To re-instate the dethroned king?

CROCCO. No, a conspiracy all our own, but made to appear as if it were theirs. . . .

PAPIA. Ah, I see. To show Master Nocio how indispensable is our protection—

CROCCO. No, that's not it. I don't mean anything make-believe!

PAPIA. And what do you mean then?

CROCCO. I mean to produce some concrete action of a very serious kind that will make any understanding impossible between them.

FILACCIONE. An action? What kind of action?

CROCCO. An action that we can interpret as a piece of revenge on the part of the dispossessed against the usurper. Do you follow me? We'll turn it to our own advantage, to the purpose of getting rid of the greatest single obstacle to our designs, the person who is most likely to bring Master Nocio and Currao together. Don't you know whom I mean? Come, come! I mean Doro.

BURRANIA. Ah, Doro!

CROCCO. Doro will stand up for Currao and La Spera against us, and he'll do everything he can to get them into his father's good graces. That would be our undoing.

PAPIA. But how are we going to get rid of him?

CROCCO. What? We must find a way, and that quickly—in fact, this very evening. Just leave it to me.

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA (*turning around to look toward the right.*)
Sh! Here he is!

FILACCIONE (*quietly*). Doro?

BURRANIA. Yes, it's he, with his sister.

CROCCO. Mita? . . . Now, do you see? He's on his way to parley with those who are down on the beach, taking his sister with him.

PAPIA. He's stopping. He must have seen us.

VOICE OF DORO. Crocco!

PAPIA. He's calling you.

CROCCO (*answering*). Hello there, Doro.

VOICE OF DORO. My father's looking for you.

CROCCO. I'll be right there. (*To the others.*) If he's looking for me that's a good sign.

(All go out on the right. For a moment the stage is empty. From the beach there floats up a sailors' chantey from the few men who have been left to watch over the boats.)

During this chantey CURRAO, TOBBA, FILLICO, and LA SPERA come up from below. They go down from the promontory on the other side in silence, and stay near the house.)

TOBBA. I say this—that if we tried to prevent them from landing, it was because we strongly suspected the truth, which is that they have come here, led by that swine, in order to throw us out and take our place.

FILLICO. By violence.

CURRAO (*brusquely*). True enough. And were we able to resist them? . . . Nol

FILLICO. Because as soon as our fellows laid eyes on the women—

CURRAO. They stopped fighting and we were overcome. What are we to do? Shall I thank Master Nocio because he stopped them from knifing me and tying me up and throwing me into the sea?

TOBBA. That's not what I mean. If you'd just let me speak—

CURRAO. What is there to say? We've been betrayed and conquered, that's all

TOBBA. Why are you admitting now what you denied before: that might makes right? That can't be!

FILLICO. Right is on our side! We got a permit to occupy the island—the police gave it to Tobba, here. They have no right at all.

TOBBA. Never mind about the permit. We set up a community of our own and our own laws; we divided the land and assigned to each one the work he should do—

CURRAO. And now they've come and smashed the whole thing to pieces. Can we prevent them? No. So that's an end to it.

TOBBA. But we might come to an understanding—

CURRAO. An understanding with *them*?

TOBBA. We might persuade them to respect—

CURRAO. Persuade *them*?

TOBBA. Persuade them to respect our right as first-comers.

CURRAO. Just you go and try to reach an understanding with them, since you think it can be done. (*To FILLICO.*) And you too! I'm staying here!

TOBBA. No, you must be the first to approach them.

CURRAO. I'm staying here, I said.

TOBBA. But I'm saying all this for your sake! Why should I

care any longer about my rights on this earth? My eyes are on heaven.

FILLICO. You must come with us, in order to stand up for what we have done and make them realize its importance. . . .

CURRAO. It wasn't very important, was it, to those fellows who laid down their arms only to carry a woman in triumph? Go along. I tell you I'm staying here.

TOBBA. I'll go in your place then. (*To FILLICO.*) Come along.

(*The two of them start to go.*)

CURRAO. Nol I forbid you! Speak for yourselves, but not for me. Don't you dare!

(*TOBBA and FILLICO go out to the right.*)

LA SPERA (*after a long pause*). You no longer have a woman to carry in triumph.

CURRAO. There, must you too join the chorus of mourning?

LA SPERA. I'm not mourning for myself, Currao.

CURRAO. And for whom then? For me? Must all of you feel sorry for me? Just look after your own affairs, if you can, and leave me alone.

LA SPERA. That's just what I wanted to say. If you want everyone to stand on his own feet, I'm quite ready to stand on mine.

CURRAO. What do you mean by that?

LA SPERA. I have my baby, and that's enough for me.

CURRAO. You had the baby before, and wasn't that enough for you?

LA SPERA. Yes, but then I had the others to look after too. Now they no longer need me and they scorn me.

CURRAO. Are you very sorry?

LA SPERA. No, why should I be sorry? I only wish that you . . .

CURRAO. That I?—

LA SPERA. That you did not feel humiliated by their scorn. . . .

CURRAO. Do you say that because of the state you see me in? How else could I feel after all that has happened?

LA SPERA. That's true. But I had an idea that I was partly to blame. And I don't want to be that. . . . I saw that you were unwilling to go with Tobba.

CURRAO. And you thought that it was on your account?

LA SPERA. On account of what they did to me. . . . But it doesn't matter.

CURRAO. And what did they do to you?

LA SPERA. Never mind . . . If that isn't the reason . . . I find consolation for everything when I look into my baby's eyes and he opens them and I see that they know no evil. In their innocence I can forget everything. All my experience of life seems to fade away into the distance, like a bad dream that is dispelled by the light of his eyes.

CURRAO (*getting up and going over to LA SPERA*). Is he asleep?

LA SPERA. Yes, he's asleep. As if nothing had happened. I saw him smile a minute ago.

CURRAO. But he will know. One day he'll know . . .

LA SPERA. It's up to me to tell him what he should know.

CURRAO. If only it weren't for the others! (*He takes the baby cautiously into his arms.*) Now all of them are here. . . . And I wanted him to grow up away from them, far away . . .

LA SPERA. Don't worry. You'll see . . . Before the others have a chance to poison his mind—

CURRAO. But they'll start doing that here and now!

LA SPERA. I'll have time—never fear—to endow him with such good judgment and charity that no matter what bad names they call me, even if they jeer at me and spit in my face, he'll not hear them, any more than he heard them just now lying wrapped in the shawl in my arms.

CURRAO. Is that what they did?

LA SPERA. Yes, but never mind—

CURRAO. When you had my baby in your arms?

LA SPERA. I protected the baby.

CURRAO. They dared to spit on you with my baby in your arms? When was that? Who did it?

LA SPERA. While you were fighting down there on the beach—

CURRAO. The cowards! The cowards! Our own men? I want to know which ones. Who were they? Those who were carrying the women in triumph?

LA SPERA. There's nothing so strange about it. You can see that. When these other women came, they saw me in comparison—

CURRAO. The way you used to be?

LA SPERA. That's what they shouted—

CURRAO. And they forgot everything—all that you have meant to them, all that you have done for them—

LA SPERA. Are you looking for gratitude? They forgot what I have done for myself. (*She lays a hand on the baby, who is still in his father's arms.*) This, this is what they forgot. What should I care for their spitting and name-calling? . . . Give him to me!

CURRAO. How can I leave him with you now?

LA SPERA. Are you afraid I can't protect him?

CURRAO. It's not a matter of protection!

LA SPERA. Are you thinking of their scorn?

CURRAO. How could you bear it? For him, I mean. For him! How could they fail to realize that he's not only your son, but my son too, and that because he's my son they must—yes, they absolutely must—respect him!

LA SPERA. You speak as if for you too—

CURRAO. And you say you don't care? How can you be so indifferent? Doesn't it matter that they spat on my son in your arms? Did they think that I was dead and gone? But they'll see! They'll see! Here! (*He hands her the baby.*)

LA SPERA. What do you want to do?

CURRAO. Get out of my way!

LA SPERA. For the love of Heaven, Currao! I spoke only—

CURRAO. The cowards! The cowards!

LA SPERA. Only to give you proof—

CURRAO. They had a change of heart when the other women came, did they? Then, it was true, was it? It was true . . .

LA SPERA. What was true? Oh, dear Lord, I can't bear to see you like this!

CURRAO. They thought I was their leader simply because I had you, and you were the only woman! When the others came, then I was no longer of any account. Wasn't that it? They tossed me aside and spit on me as well as you. On me and my son. Oh, no! They'll have to reckon with me yet!

LA SPERA. There, now! That's the way I like to see you! On your feet again!

CURRAO. I'll have a revenge so crushing—

LA SPERA. Not revenge! Revenge!

CURRAO. Yes, that's it exactly! Revenge!

LA SPERA. They were attracted by the prestige of the new arrivals, whom they had hankered after for so long.

CURRAO. And is that why they had to toss me and my baby aside, along with you?

LA SPERA. Because they thought that you derived your prestige from your exclusive possession of me.

CURRAO. And they ran after these rags of female finery, the swine! For a lot of sniffing women who'll never let them have any part of them, even if they did let themselves be embraced when they first landed! They've forgotten everything! They've lost the use of their own eyes! I loathe them! To think they imagined that I was their leader only because I had you!

LA SPERA. Now you have a chance to show them that it isn't true.

CURRAO. And how am I to do that, if it is just on your account that they deserted me?

LA SPERA. This is what I wanted to tell you, do you see? That you mustn't feel yourself to be an object of the scorn which it is only natural that they should feel toward me.

CURRAO. Oh, you think it's natural, do you? Does that mean you don't want my son to stay with you?

LA SPERA. No, no! What's that you say?

CURRAO. If you want to play the part of a saint, it's up to you. But not my son! I can't tolerate that for my son!

LA SPERA. I don't say that you should tolerate it. Just tell them again what ideals you had in your heart when you came here. You'll draw them all back to you again, never fear! And don't bother . . . don't bother any more about me . . . Look, here comes Doro, with his sister.

(She steps to one side, as DORO and MITA come in from the right. DORO is holding his sister's hand as if she were ashamed or reluctant to come with him.)

DORO. Come along now; don't be ashamed. Here is Currao and that is La Spera with her baby. This is my sister Mita.

LA SPERA. Yes, I remember having seen you before . . .

DORO. Yes, one evening at Nuccio d'Alagna's tavern. That's true.

MITA. I don't really remember . . .

DORO. Because she has changed so much since then. No wonder you can't remember her.

MITA (*to CURRAO*). Didn't they hurt you?

CURRAO. *Your fellows?* No, not they.

DORO. It was those cowards, egged on by Crocco—

CURRAO. Yes, our own men—

DORO. Who turned on her like so many dogs!

MITA. But now my father wants to bring you all together.

He's trying just now, together with some of your followers, to restore peace.

CURRAO. Peace? There's more than one of them that will do his best to prevent any such solution.

MITA. Surely not. It seemed to me as if they were all trying—

CURRAO (*interrupting brusquely*). Yes, because I'm here and not there.

LA SPERA. Go ahead, persuade him, both of you, to go with you. Come Doro, get your sister to persuade him . . .

MITA. Come now. Do come on.

DORO. My father has been looking for you.

MITA. Yes, that's true. I heard him asking about you. He thinks the world of you, you know.

CURRAO. He thinks the world of me, eh? Then why did he let Crocco persuade him to come here?

DORO. Ah, but I'll tell him that he mustn't trust Crocco any longer. And it will put Crocco and his allies properly in their places to see you turn up between me and my sister.

MITA. I never liked him either. If Doro hadn't been here I should have done everything I could, believe me, to prevent my father from coming. As things are now, no one is better fitted than yourself to protect my father from Crocco.

DORO (*turning to look toward the right*). See—here he comes now, to look for you, and Tobba and Fillico with him. What better proof of his friendliness could you desire?

MITA. Yes, here he is, right now.

(MASTER NOCIO, TOBBA, and FILLICO enter from the right. LA SPERA steps farther away and then sits down on a rock in front of the house. Evening is beginning to fall.)

MASTER NOCIO. I've come to look for you, Currao, and to give you my hand in token that this landing of ours was never intended, in spite of what you thought, to be hostile to you or your friends. And I want to invite you to come and celebrate

with us—both our arrival and my happy meeting with my son. And, by the way, I want to thank you for the handsome way you've treated him.

TOBBA. And La Spera too! Where is she? (*He looks around for her.*)

MASTER NOCIO (*promptly*). Let's talk just among ourselves for the present. . . . Once the shock of the first meeting was over—which was only a matter of minutes and with no damage done to either side—I expected that you would come, with your friends, to see me.

CURRAO. I didn't come, Master Nocio, for the simple reason that I can't raise any enthusiasm for the peace which you feel you can establish between us; I cannot summon up the slightest enthusiasm.

MASTER NOCIO. No?

CURRAO. That is, if it depends upon things no longer being as they were before.

MASTER NOCIO. And why shouldn't they stay the way they were before, if that way was a good one?

CURRAO. Because a good way is hard to find, and a bad one is all too easy. I'm thinking of the speed with which my men surrendered. The good way we were looking for here can't coincide with yours.

MASTER NOCIO. Why not?

CURRAO. Because you are lucky enough not to need the same thing as we do. You are rich and you lived under the protection of the law. What made you come here among us?

MASTER NOCIO. A sudden inspiration—the attraction of something new . . .

CURRAO. Just a whim!

MASTER NOCIO. No, a real temptation. And then there was my boy . . . I threw myself into the idea—and here we are! Now we can come to an agreement profitable to both sides.

CURRAO. How can that be? I've just explained. If you've

come for no good reason, just for a whim which an enemy of mine has persuaded you to follow, what can you be after? You say that we, too, may profit from your coming? That's not true. All these luxuries that you have brought with you—we don't need them. They will spoil everything, inevitably.

MASTER NOCIO. Spoil everything? Oh, no.

FILLICO. Let's make sure that nothing will be spoiled!

MASTER NOCIO. We'll see to that.

CURRAO. Everything, I tell you. It will all be too easy. Hear that now? The banqueting and music and dancing? . . . You've brought ease and amusements with you, and out of them will come envy and jealousy, ambition and intrigue. All the vices of the city came with you, and women and money, to boot. And we had fled the city as if we were fleeing the plague.

MASTER NOCIO. They're just having a little fun. What harm is there in that? We must allow ourselves a little pleasure in this world. By the way, I'd forgotten . . . (*To DORO.*) Do call some of the crews. (*DORO goes out on the right.*) I brought some wine—

CURRAO. Wine too?

MASTER NOCIO. Not the kind that Nuccio d'Alagna used to serve! This is a wine—well, you'll taste it for yourself! (*And he starts to climb back up the promontory.*) We all want a drink! It was a wonderful undertaking, this trip of ours! (*He shouts down to the men watching the boats.*) You boys from the *Angelina*, roll out the barrels of wine and the other supplies. And you from the *Costanza*, bring out the flares that are packed up in the bow. We must have light! (*He comes back down.*)

FILLICO. Are you going to hold a regular celebration?

MASTER NOCIO. Of course! Without any of the bad intentions dreamed up by Currao! Just to celebrate our arrival, as I said before.

TOBBA. Yesterday evening at this hour, Master Nocio, when

our work was done, we ate La Spera's soup—where is she? Oh, over there!—by the light of our fishermen's lanterns. While Filaccione, a little distance away, sang beneath the stars; and then, finally, we all went peacefully to sleep.

CURRAO. Think well of what you have done. You've fallen into the hands of an imposter who'll try to band the others together to take advantage of you in every possible way. And then to whom will you turn? By coming here you've put yourself beyond the reach of your own law, and you've destroyed the law that we had set up. Do you see what you've got yourself into?

MASTER NOCIO. But if I put myself in your hands? That's what I came to do!

(DORO comes back, with TRENTUNO, IL RICCIO, FILACCIONE, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, and three men from the various crews.)

TRENTUNO. Here we are!

IL RICCIO. At your orders, Master Nocio!

FILACCIONE. What's to be done?

MASTER NOCIO. Go unload the food and wine from the boats.

TRENTUNO. Master Nocio, hurrah!

IL RICCIO. Wine! Wine!

FILACCIONE. Women and wine! Women and wine!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Let's have a good time; Let's have a good time!

(Shouting and cavorting with joy, they rush down to the beach.)

CURRAO (*half ironically, half in earnest*). Tobba, you are a prophet . . . remind him that the island's not safe! Tell him that if everyone starts to dance it may sink into the sea.

MASTER NOCIO (*maliciously*). Even if you dance with Mita, my daughter? (*He takes CURRAO by the arm and leads him away.*) Come, come, let us go.

(He goes off with MITA, CURRAO, TOBBA, DORO and FILLICO, without so much as a look at LA SPERA, who stays with her baby in the shadows.)

Up from the beach, carousing, with lighted flares, come TRENTUNO, IL RICCIO, FILACCIONE, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, and the sailors, loaded with provisions and barrels of wine, and shouting.)

CHORUS. Hurry! Hurry!

Light, light!

Women and wine!

Women and wine!

Let's have a good time!

Let's have a good time!

(They disappear on the right, leaping and shouting, to the sound of cymbals and accordions. Then their noise dies out in the distance.)

A pause.

In the darkness we see lamps lit on the masts of the boats.)

LA SPERA *(talking, amid the silence of the night, to her baby)*. Alone? No, you're not alone, Nico, you're not alone. They have left you with your mother. And neither am I alone, Nico, if they've left me with you, my love and my joy, my Nico . . .

C U R T A I N

ACT THREE

Same scene as the preceding act, but enlivened by preparations for a great celebration. On the promontory the road leading down to the beach is decked with poles and garlands and colored lights. At the front of the stage, to the right, is a sort of pavilion: a big, square, yellow canvas with a rising sun painted in the middle is hung like a canopy over a table covered with a violet cloth. On the table are gifts for the brides: cashmere shawls with long fringes, violet scarves, big, bright silk handkerchiefs, coral necklaces, and gold bracelets.

Bare, and rougher than before, nestled under the rock is LA SPERA'S tumble-down house, with its green door.

When the curtain goes up, the stage is empty, but from the beach come shouts and the laughter of women, who are being pursued in fun: NELA, LA DIA, MARELLA, and SIDORA, chased by PAPIA, IL RICCIO, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, BURRANIA, and FILACCIONE.

Soon after, the green door of LA SPERA'S house opens cautiously from the inside. DORO comes out and LA SPERA talks to him from the threshold.

LA SPERA. No, go along, Doro, and take my advice; don't come here again.

DORO. Do you say that on account of my father?

LA SPERA. I say it on everybody's account, including your father's.

DORO. Listen—listen to them shouting. They sound as if they'd all gone mad.

LA SPERA (*with a purpose, but also with sorrow*). Mita too?

DORO (*quickly*). No, not Mita. (*Somberly.*) But even she has got to put out of her head . . .

LA SPERA (*anxiously*). Do you know anything, Doro?

DORO (*quickly*). No, not a thing.

LA SPERA. Then why do you say . . .

DORO. What? . . . No. . . .

LA SPERA (*after a brief pause, slowly, looking into his eyes*). You have something on your mind—something that I am prepared for . . .

DORO (*trying to hide his uneasiness*). No, no. . . . It's only that all this noise—do you hear it? Is it right to laugh and shout and carry on that way? They're neglecting everything else—no one is doing his work— And certain things that once would have seemed beyond the pale now seem entirely legitimate to them. Anything goes!

LA SPERA. Is that true of your sister, too?

DORO. My sister has my father and myself to look after her.

LA SPERA. There's nothing your father can do now, Doro. They're leading him by the nose. I'm the only one he's never once looked in the face, even for a moment. . . . Nor your sister either.

DORO. Oh, it's just a narrow-minded prejudice—

LA SPERA. I know, I know. . . . It doesn't matter. Run along, Doro. It's better that you shouldn't be seen here with me.

DORO. For your sake or mine?

LA SPERA. For yours. What else can happen to me at this stage of the game? And what harm can you, of all people, do me?

DORO. And what harm can happen to me?

LA SPERA. I'm the black sheep of the flock and no one must come near me. But I can defend myself if need be. Tooth and nail. Never fear. . . . Go along, now. Don't you hear? They're coming up. . . .

DORO (*starting to go*). Very well. But remember, you can count on me . . .

(*He goes off to the right. LA SPERA goes back into the house and shuts the door. Running up from the beach, amid shouting and laughter, come LA DIA and OSSO-DI-SEPPIA; MARELLA between PAPIA and IL RICCIO; SIDORA and BURRANIA; NELA and FILACCIONE. The fragments of their conversation are to be spoken simultaneously, so that even if the single words are lost, the gestures of the speakers will illustrate their meaning and the general effect will be lively.*)

LA DIA. No, no, that's enough now!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. What do you mean, enough? Now comes the best of all

LA DIA. Enough, I say! Take your hands off of me! (*She starts to pull away.*)

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA (*catching hold of her dress*). No, you can't get away from me!

LA DIA. Let go! You're tearing my dress!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Then give me a kiss!

LA DIA. No!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Then I'll take it!

LA DIA (*struggling free*). I'll call Quanterba, if you don't watch out!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Now of all times! First, you tickled me!

LA DIA. No! Me?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Yes, you and your friends!

LA DIA. That was all a joke. Now it's *over*. (OSSO-DI-SEPPIA *kisses her.*) You brute! Pugh! You stink of tobacco! (*She pushes him away.*) Get along with you!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Give me another! Give me another!

LA DIA. Get along with you or I'll scream. Get along, get along—or I'll really call him.

* * *

PAPIA. If you gave one to him, than you have to give me one tool

MARELLA. Oh, I do, do I? He gave it to me; I didn't give it to him!

PAPIA. Then you just wait and I'll give *you* one, too!

IL RICCIO (*pushing PAPIA away with a hand on his chest*). Nol Stay away from her if she doesn't want you!

PAPIA. Oh, it's you, is it? Let me hear you say that again!

IL RICCIO. I'll say it again! Get out!

MARELLA (*coming between them*). Come on, don't fight! Let's settle it like this. One for you! (*She kisses PAPIA on one cheek.*) And one for you! (*She kisses IL RICCIO on the other.*)

IL RICCIO. Good! That makes two for me!

PAPIA. Then I want another!

MARELLA. Here you are then! (*She kisses him again.*) Are you so starved, then?

IL RICCIO. Starved! That's exactly what we are!

MARELLA. I've never seen anything like this! (*Noticing the pavilion.*) Oh, look!

PAPIA. Here's where we'll have the party!

MARELLA (*running to the table*). And here are wedding presents for the brides!

• • •

SIDORA (*with a twig in her hand*). That's not true. All four of us went down to the beach. . . .

BURRANIA. To see us, that was it.

SIDORA. Not at all!

BURRANIA. You knew all along that we were there!

SIDORA. We didn't know anything of the sort.

BURRANIA. Little liar!

SIDORA. You were asleep! Stretched out on the sand like so many dead men.

BURRANIA. And you resurrected us with your little toes!

SIDORA. What do you mean, toes? This is what did it! (*And she slaps his face with the twig.*)

BURRANIA. Murder! (*He starts to grab her but she slides away.*)

SIDORA. Can't catch me! Can't catch me!

BURRANIA. You hurt me, did you know that?

SIDORA. It's no more than you deserved!

BURRANIA. Just because I never got anywhere with you!

SIDORA. Take your hands off me! Oh, look! Presents! Presents!
(*And she too goes up to the table.*)

• • •

NELA. No, no! Oh, my God! Help! (*She starts to fall.*)

FILACCIONE (*holding her up*). What is it?

NELA. I was just about to fall!

FILACCIONE. Didn't you ever fall before?

NELA. *You fool!*

FILACCIONE. With Trentuno, wasn't it?

NELA. Him of all men! And why would he be marrying me then,

FILACCIONE. Exactly! That's a good one! And why would you be marrying him?

NELA. Go along, dog-face! (*She strikes him on the chest and then tries in vain to break away.*) Oh, good God, I have a crick in my leg!

FILACCIONE. Come—I'll hold you up.

NELA. No thanks, I can walk alone.

FILACCIONE. Lame on your wedding day! Shocking!

NELA. You can be sure I wouldn't marry you, anyhow!

FILACCIONE. Are you trying to get my price down so you can buy me?

NELA. I wouldn't have you at any price!

• • •

MARELLA. Look at those shawls! (*She takes one off the table and throws it across her shoulders.*)

SIDORA. And the necklaces! (*She takes one and fastens it around her neck.*)

FILACCIONE (*to NELA*). If you knew what a husband I'd be!
NELA. About like a salmon that goes for fresh water every spring!

LA DIA (*coming to take the shawl off of MARELLA'S shoulders*). Take that thing off! It isn't yours! And put it back where it belongs!

MARELLA. Oh, so they're all yours, are they?

LA DIA. They're not yours— that's one thing sure.

MARELLA (*laying the shawl down*). I only wanted to try it on.

NELA (*pointing to SIDORA*). And look at her with that necklace!

SIDORA. This is mine! No one's going to get it away from me!

LA DIA. That one there? How do you know?

SIDORA. Well, one of them is bound to be mine!

BURRANIA. I'll give it to her—how's that?

SIDORA. Oh, he will, will he? The tramp! He hasn't got enough money to keep even a dog!

(*MASTER NOCIO, FILLICO, and three old sailors come on from the right.*)

FILLICO (*pointing out the revelers to MASTER NOCIO*). There they are! See!

FIRST SAILOR (*to NELA*). Get along with you, you shameless hussy, or else, by God . . . (*He hangs over her threateningly.*)

SECOND SAILOR (*to SIDORA*). Go home! Straight home, or I'll knock you down.

THIRD SAILOR (*at the same time, to MARELLA, kicking her*). Is there no shame in you? Get along! And thank God that I don't kill you like the bitch that you are.

PAPIA (*holding him back*). Easy there, old man.

IL RICCIO (*holding him back on the other side*). It's all fun!

FILACCIONE (*at the same time, holding back the first sailor*).
Go to the devill Here we're out of this world!

BURRANIA (*restraining the second sailor*). What's this talk of
knocking down. I'll knock you down first.

FILLICO (*to MASTER NOCIO*). How long can this go on?

FIRST SAILOR. There's no respect, no disciplinel

(*The girls, laughing and shouting, run away to the right.*)

MASTER NOCIO. That's enough! It's time to stop!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Stop what, Master Nocio? We weren't doing
anything wrong!

IL RICCIO. Today of all days! When it's a great holiday!

PAPIA. We're here to keep order, you know, under your di-
rect command!

FIRST SAILOR. Order, he calls it!

SECOND SAILOR. The place is a whorehouse!

THIRD SAILOR. They're turning our daughters--

MASTER NOCIO. Enough! Silence! I order you all to be quiet!
(*To the five colonists.*) You get out of the way!

(PAPIA, BURRANIA, IL RICCIO, OSSO-DI-SEPPIA, *and* FILACCIONE
go to sit on the rocks.)

FILLICO. We must find a remedy for this situation, Master
Nocio. We can't go on this way.

FIRST SAILOR. I know where I'm going to find a remedy, I tell
you! Even if I lose my job for it!

SECOND SAILOR. So do I!

THIRD SAILOR. We're all leaving! We're going back to the
mainland!

FIRST SAILOR. We can't let our daughters go like this!

SECOND SAILOR. Here there's no God and no law!

THIRD SAILOR. They're running wild!

MASTER NOCIO. Aren't we just planning to find a remedy?

THIRD SAILOR. And what do you expect to do?

FIRST SAILOR. What right have you to celebrate these marriages tonight?

MASTER NOCIO. What marriages? It's only make-believe.

THIRD SAILOR. Make-believe?

SECOND SAILOR. How's that, make-believe?

FIRST SAILOR. And who'll be able to hold them down, once they imagine themselves as married? Are you joking?

MASTER NOCIO. There was never any idea of real marriages.

FILLICO. Then someone had better tell them so!

MASTER NOCIO. A mock ceremony, before me—that's all we mean to have. Just to give them something to do. And on condition that tomorrow, when the celebration is over, they'll go back quietly and sensibly to their work.

FIRST SAILOR. To work, eh? Sensibly, you say? No one's going back to work around here, let me tell you!

SECOND SAILOR. They say that here we are out of bounds of the law.

FIRST SAILOR. Out of this world, they say. And that's the truth! To me, this is hell!

FILLICO. Master Nocio, the only thing to do, I tell you, is to re-instate law and order.

FIRST SAILOR (*softly, so that the five colonists cannot hear*). To give back authority to the only man who knows how to wield it!

SECOND SAILOR. Currao! Currao!

THIRD SAILOR. Sh! Quietly!

MASTER NOCIO (*pointing to the right*). Let's go over there.

FILLICO. He must derive his authority from you, do you see? He must command in your name, since you're the master. He must become . . . (*Talking to themselves, they exit from the right.*)

PAPIA. What did they say?

IL RICCIO. It's that wretch Fillico, who's plotting . . .

(CROCCO comes from the beach. He sees the five settlers follow, with their eyes, the little group that is walking away.)

CROCCO. Ah, so you're here, are you? At last! I've been looking for you for over an hour. . . . But what's the matter?

PAPIA. Look! Look over there!

CROCCO. What is it?

FILACCIONE. Those old fools!

BURRANIA. They went away conferring among themselves. . . .

CROCCO. We've got to stop it, I tell you.

IL RICCIO. We're ready.

CROCCO. Ready, are you? What have you been doing? I find you roosting here like a flock of chickens.

FILACCIONE. We're waiting . . .

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. There's plenty of time before the celebration begins. Didn't you say—when the lanterns are lit?

CROCCO (*coming down from the rocks with the others*). As if we didn't have to plan carefully . . .

BURRANIA. You said to leave that all up to you!

CROCCO. But we have the final details to settle!

FILACCIONE. Haven't we settled everything?

CROCCO. I mean, exactly how we are to incite the quarrel. . . .

PAPIA. We'll have to do that on the spot! You can't plan anything of that sort in advance.

CROCCO. Fool! Do you think it's so easy? It must seem as if *they* were the ones to start it—

FILACCIONE. To start a quarrel?

CROCCO. Exactly! As if they had a previous understanding, for the purpose of killing the old man. Then—however that may be—when the old man escapes, thanks to our help, the son will catch it. I must stand beside the old man—that's absolutely essential. So who will take care of Doro?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA (*interrupting him and pointing stealthily toward LA SPERA'S house*). Sh! Be careful; there's—

CROCCO. Yes, of course—La Spera. (*He remains perplexed for a moment, then bursts out suddenly.*) If she's heard us, by God, I'll strangle her. (*And he starts to go and open her door.*)

PAPIA (*trying to hold him back*). What are you doing?

CROCCO (*resolutely*). Let me have my way. (*Opening the door.*) My lady! Come out here!

(*LA SPERA appears at the door.*)

LA SPERA. Oh, it's you? What more do you want from me?

CROCCO. Just natural curiosity. We just wanted to know whether, among the couples who are stepping up in front of Master Nocio this evening under that canopy, we shall see you and Curraol

FILACCIONE. It's about time, I'd say!

(*The others laugh.*)

LA SPERA (*looking at him as if she had come to a decision*). How can you say that? Can you imagine my taking part in a marriage? . . . Haven't you thrown me back into my old status? In that case . . .

PAPIA. In that case, what?

LA SPERA. My kind of a woman doesn't marry. People spit in her face. You know that.

CROCCO. We do, that's true. That's our privilege, as things are now. But he—

LA SPERA. Not he, you say? Why should it be your privilege and not his? That's a pretty state of affairs! He must have just as much saliva in his mouth for spitting at me as you do! And he's clever enough, if he steps up under that canopy, to do it with somebody better than me!

CROCCO. Ah, so you've noticed, have you?

LA SPERA. Noticed what?

CROCCO. That he's been making eyes at Mita.

LA SPERA (*more promptly and steadily than ever*). Yes, in order to get her away from you.

CROCCO (*not expecting such an answer or such self-assurance*). From me?

LA SPERA. Yes, to get even with you.

CROCCO. What do you mean, get even?

LA SPERA. What? Don't you remember that you tried to take me from him?

CROCCO. Oh, is that all?

LA SPERA. Isn't it true?

CROCCO. No, my dear, because he *still* has you—

LA SPERA (*with supreme boldness*). As anyone can have me nowadays.

PAPIA. Is that so?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Anyone at all?

IL RICCIO. Have you gone back to—

FILACCIONE. Can anyone come to see you?

LA SPERA. Easy there! Are you surprised? Isn't that what you were after when you humiliated me?

CROCCO. Yes, we wanted to get you down to the cheap level where you belong. That was the original trouble—that you should belong to him alone and not to the rest of us, and that on this basis he should claim to be our leader.

LA SPERA. I see. But now, even with me, he no longer holds sway. Mita has become the source of power. You dragged me in the mud, and so, in order to go you one better, he drags me in the mud too. And what's to be done about that? (*She looks at him and laughs in his face as if she were drunk or the prostitute that she used to be.*)

PAPIA. Are you excusing him, or accusing him?

LA SPERA. Neither one or the other. I'm just telling you what he does.

CROCCO. So he despises you because I despised you?

LA SPERA. You can't deny that you were trying to pull him down when you spat at me, can you?

CROCCO. But he's a coward, if now that you're no use to him,

he tosses you aside. And all the more so, if, as you say, it's in order that I shouldn't throw him out of power.

LA SPERA (*looking at him hard and going up to him in something like her old manner; then speaking slowly, with emphasis on every word*). Surely you remember that when these friends of yours were teasing you, jeering and shouting in your face: "There she is. She's yours for the taking! Just hold out your hand!" I was the only one who came to your defense against the lot of them.

CROCCO. Are you defending him now for doing what I did the other day when I had just come ashore? Was I a coward to hold you up to scorn? No, my dear. You're forgetting that on that day long ago when you stood up for me against the rest, after they had all gone, you rejected me!

LA SPERA. I was his then. I had to. (*She gives him a strange look, and then, as if stifling an inner rage, she goes on.*) You see, the real trouble—yours and mine—is that *you* haven't got Mita.

CROCCO. What do you mean?

LA SPERA. That he may grab her.

PAPIA. What? And desert you and the baby?

LA SPERA (*looking at him defiantly*). I told him myself to desert me.

THE OTHERS (*astounded*). You did?

LA SPERA. To see what he'd do next.

FILACCIONE. And what did he do?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. He cares for his son! He always has.

LA SPERA. But he cares more to be a leader. You'll see that in order to attain his ambition, he'll desert his son too.

BURRANIA. He wants to get back in power. That's clear as daylight!

LA SPERA. Whatever the price might be! That's all he cares for.

CROCCO. Then . . . you must be on our side.

LA SPERA. On your side? I'm here—alone and abandoned . . .

CROCCO. If you realize that, then you must be with us.

LA SPERA. Yes, I'm with you, if you tell me what you have in mind.

CROCCO (*looking at her hard*). Don't you know?

LA SPERA. No. What is it?

CROCCO (*still staring at her*). You didn't overhear?

LA SPERA. No. Overhear what?

CROCCO (*with guile*). What we were saying about Currao's plans.

LA SPERA. Currao's?

CROCCO. You don't know anything?

LA SPERA. Not a thing. What does he plan to do?

FILACCIONE (*understanding what CROCCO is driving at*). Ah, yes. She must have some inkling.

LA SPERA. No, not the slightest inkling, I assure you.

PAPIA. About the conspiracy—

LA SPERA. A conspiracy? Of Currao's?

PAPIA. Yes, Currao. With his few remaining loyal followers.

LA SPERA. A conspiracy? Why? Against whom?

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. In order to get what he wants. He wants more than Mita, you know.

FILACCIONE. Luckily we're here—

CROCCO (*feigning suspicion*). That's enough. She doesn't know; didn't you hear? And we don't know, either. Anyhow, he won't get away with it! You can take Crocco's word for that!

BURRANIA. On the contrary—

CROCCO. Quiet there!

BURRANIA. But if she's on our side—

CROCCO. That's enough, I say! We only wanted to know if she had any inkling. . . . And, well, she hasn't . . . so that's all there is to it. We know very little ourselves . . . just a thing

or two we've heard rumored. . . . But I hardly believe it myself. It would be too stupid.

LA SPERA. He's anything but stupid! And with whom could he conspire? (*To CROCCO.*) He's not the kind to enter into a conspiracy. And neither is Fillico. What's more, they're sure now that Master Nocio is going to turn to them. Tobba is so pleased—

CROCCO. Did he tell you so?

LA SPERO. Yes, because he doesn't realize how painful it is to me to hear it. He can't and won't believe—

CROCCO. That Currao could desert you?

LA SPERA. He doesn't know all that I know. One can't say certain things. . . .

CROCCO. But you feel deserted already, do you?

LA SPERA. Yes.

CROCCO. That means he's already sure of getting away with it!

LA SPERA. God won't permit it! God won't permit it!

CROCCO. We won't permit it, and nobody else should permit it either! (*He turns to his companions as if he just had a new idea.*) Look here! (*He turns back to LA SPERA.*) Couldn't you report him?

LA SPERA. Report him? To whom?

CROCCO. To Master Nocio!

LA SPERA. Report him for what?

CROCCO. For this conspiracy. There's really something to it, you know. I toned it down at first because I wasn't sure of how you felt. He wants Mita, to be sure—but mostly as a means to obtaining complete power. But there's one obstacle in his way, an obstacle to his getting either one. That's Doro.

LA SPERA. Doro?

PAPIA. Yes. Doro is fond of you, and hence he's sure to oppose Currao's marriage to his sister. Do you see?

BURRANIA. They want to get him out of the way!

LA SPERA. Doro? Who wants to get him out of the way? No, I can't believe it!

BURRANIA. This very evening, in the course of the festivities.

CROCCO. They'll stage a quarrel, and amid the confusion one of them is supposed to—

LA SPERA. No! No!

BURRANIA (*as if he just had an idea*). But if you are the one to report him, then—

FILACCIONE. Yes, but—it's better for her that they should carry it off.

LA SPERA. What are you saying? That they should put Doro out of the way? No, no! Never! He must be saved, at any cost!

CROCCO. Exactly, if you report the plot.

BURRANIA. What would be the good of that? No one will believe her. They'll say she's an interested party.

CROCCO. Fool! What does it matter if they don't believe her, to start with? Listen to me! What matters to us is that someone should report them, someone who's in a position to know more about the conspiracy than we do. Never mind if they don't believe her. When what she has said comes true—

LA SPERA. But it mustn't come true! They mustn't carry it out!

CROCCO. If no one believes you, it's bound to happen!

LA SPERA. No! It's up to you to prevent it!

CROCCO. We'll do what we can. But Master Nocio will be responsible for whatever happens . . . if he doesn't believe you. And later on he'll admit that you—

LA SPERA. No, not that poor boy! Why do you wish such an innocent soul to be the victim?

CROCCO. We don't want him to be the victim.

LA SPERA. No! It can't be! It can't be!

CROCCO. If you report them, you'll have done your best to save him. And if they believe you, then he's as good as saved. And you'll save yourself and your baby as well, if you prevent

Currao from winning Mita and deserting you. He'll be banished from the island and you can follow him into banishment.

PAPIA. It's all up to you!

BURRANIA. Exactly!

IL RICCIO. We've given you due warning.

BURRANIA (*to the others*). Now everything's set.

CROCCO. You must make a solemn accusation at the height of the festivities, before everyone.

PAPIA. And we'll support you unanimously!

OSSO-DI-SEPPIA. Yes! Splendid!

(*Four sailors come in from the right and start to climb the rocky height to hang up colored lanterns for the impending celebration.*)

CROCCO (*to LA SPERA*). Are we agreed, then? (*LA SPERA is lost in anxiety and dismay and does not reply*). Answer me!

LA SPERA. Yes . . . We must save Doro . . . And my baby, too . . .

CROCCO. We'll go now. But we'll soon see you again. Stand your ground, remember! It all depends on you.

PAPIA (*as the little group starts to move away*). Look, they're lighting the lanterns.

IL RICCIO (*to one of the sailors*). Will the procession come up from the beach?

FIRST SAILOR. Yes, this way.

(*CROCCO, BURRANIA, FILACCIONE, and OSSO-DI-SEPPIA go out first, to the right, with PAPIA and IL RICCIO behind them. LA SPERA sits down, motionless, on a stone.*)

SECOND SAILOR. They're all down on the beach.

THIRD SAILOR. If you could see how the brides are decked out!

FOURTH SAILOR. As if they were getting married in earnest. This will be a regular carnival!

(TOBBA comes in, in consternation, from the right. He sees the sailors lighting the lanterns around the festive table, and stops to look on disapprovingly. Then he sees LA SPERA sitting there in silence, and sits down on another rock beside her.)

FIRST SAILOR. Good evening, Tobba. You're to sit here under the canopy beside Master Nocio, aren't you?

SECOND SAILOR. What a sight that will be! Master Nocio in behalf of the law, and you in the name of the Church. Everything in legal order, and with the benefit of the sacraments!

THIRD SAILOR. This won't be any joke!

FOURTH SAILOR. No joke, indeed. You'll see how fast the population of free souls increases!

FIRST SAILOR. That's only natural. The law and the Church have no place here, except in a joke, have they, Tobba?

LA SPERA (*getting up*). If only God were here indeed! . . . But He is—He is. You'll see that He is. . . . So you came to turn the law and the Church into derision! But you're not the only ones. . . . (*She looks at TOBBA.*)

FIRST SAILOR. What's that?

SECOND SAILOR. What's the matter?

THIRD SAILOR. Who have you got it in for?

FOURTH SAILOR. Haven't you got over it yet?

TOBBA. That's not true of me, or of Currao, either. If you will help us—

LA SPERA. I?

TOBBA. Yes, it's entirely up to you.

LA SPERA. You too say that it's up to me? Both sides say the same thing. But what do you mean?

TOBBA. You can save everything. Let me explain. (*He makes a sign to the effect that the sailors are present.*)

LA SPERA. I can save everything? What can I do? Well, then, is it all decided? Will he marry her?

TOBBA. I'll explain . . . Wait just a minute . . .

LA SPERA. Yes! Yes! I'll give him up! He's given me up already . . . But I understood the whole thing from the beginning and told him to leave me. If that's the way to save everything, go tell him that I agree. Let him save the situation as he will.

TOBBA. That's not the point, La Spera. You wouldn't believe it, but—

LA SPERA. That's not the point? And what is it then?

TOBBA. Something else—if God gives you the strength. Now I'll tell you.

LA SPERA. Isn't that enough?

TOBBA. No, not enough.

LA SPERA. Am I to go away? Do they want to send me away?

FIRST SAILOR. There's the lighting for you!

SECOND SAILOR. Beautiful, isn't it? And there'll be flares besides.

THIRD SAILOR. Come along. Let's go meet the procession.

FOURTH SAILOR. In a few minutes, when the moon rises, they'll start on their way.

(The four sailors go up the road and down toward the beach.)

TOBBA *(standing up resolutely)*. Do you love your son?

LA SPERA. My son? What is that you are saying?

TOBBA. I put it the wrong way. Of course I know that you love him. I meant to ask whether you care more for his good than for your own.

LA SPERA. Of course I do.

TOBBA. No matter how high the price?

LA SPERA. Yes, no matter how high. . . .

TOBBA. Even at the price of giving up your love for him?

LA SPERA. What does all this mean? What connection is there with my son, and my love for him, and giving it up for his good? *(Suddenly she suspects that they want to take her son from her.)* Is it that he—

TOBBA. No, not hel

LA SPERA. That he wants to take away my son?

TOBBA. Not unless you are willing . . .

LA SPERA. Willing? How can I be willing?

TOBBA. Everything would be saved!

LA SPERA. Are you mad? So he wants to take away my son?
My son?

TOBBA. No, he doesn't want to take him away. In fact, he says that's quite impossible—

LA SPERA. I should say it is! Impossible!

TOBBA. But I still say that for everything to be saved—

LA SPERA. And how is this a way to save everything? Explain! By taking away my son?

TOBBA. If he could marry Mita—

LA SPERA. And why doesn't he marry her? Let him go right ahead!

TOBBA. But he doesn't want to leave his son!

LA SPERA. Oh, he doesn't want to leave his son—is that it? That's too bad! The baby is mine and he's staying with me!

TOBBA. He's Currao's tool

LA SPERA. Who denies that? I'm not trying to take him away. Let Currao stay here and share him with me. Is there no end to what he wants? Power and glory, and what else besides?

TOBBA. Nothing! Nothing at all! He refuses everything unless he can have his son.

LA SPERA. Has he made that the basis of an agreement?

TOBBA. Exactly!

LA SPERA. That I should give him my son? He must be mad!

TOBBA. In view of the fact that the baby might be better off with him than with you.

LA SPERA. And I should take this into consideration? I should think of my son's good when he wants him only in order to achieve this marriage?

TOBBA. If he refuses to marry her without his son, it seems

to me that he really loves him. That should give you confidence in him.

LA SPERA. What's that! You speak to me of the good of my son, when it's a matter of giving him to another woman who would teach him to despise me? If Currao really cared for him, he would see that he should stay with his mother, because only his mother who bore him can give him real love. . . . He wants to toss me aside completely, that's all. Let him toss me aside and take everything he wants! But under no such conditions as these! Such conditions are impossible! Is he bargaining with my flesh and blood? What is he, then? A hyena? And *you* are the one to propose it, to preach to me about what is best for my son, to suggest that he should leave his mother. You want to send me straight back to perdition, is that it? Buy me off with a little money and then put me on a boat for the mainland? You want to send me back, without my son, into the streets around the harbor? That's what you want to do with me, is it? After I have made myself over in the sight of God; and I am the only one here full of God's love for his creatures! . . . If he wants to do this—if he has thought of taking away my son—then the worst that they say of him must be true, even if he hasn't yet actually thought of it, but someone else has diabolically thought of it for him. But I shall report him! Yes, I shall report him! Because that is the only way I can save Doro, too! (*There is the noise of a procession coming nearer, from the direction of the beach, with clashing cymbals and smoking flares.*) Here they are! Here they are! They're coming! I'll report him! I'm going for my child!

(*She runs into the house, picks up her baby, hides him under her shawl, and reappears on the stage. The procession comes nearer and nearer.*)

TOBBA *has been left in perplexity and anguish. When he sees LA SPERA in such a state of desperate resolution, he goes over to her resolutely.*)

TOBBA. Whom do you mean to report?

LA SPERA. Currao!

TOBBA. What for?

LA SPERA. You'll soon hear!

TOBBA. Are you mad? What can you accuse him of?

LA SPERA. A conspiracy! A conspiracy!

TOBBA. A conspiracy?

LA SPERA. Your plot to kill Doro!

TOBBA. What's that! You're mad! Who wants to kill Doro?

LA SPERA. Currao. Just as he wants to take away my son!

TOBBA. But it's not true! You're raving!

LA SPERA. But I'll save Doro, too. You'll see. They'll believe me!

TOBBA. Who will believe you?

LA SPERA. If no one believes me, then the earth will split open! Yes, the earth will split open! . . . Here they are! Here they are!

(The procession arrives, in clumsy pomposity, with lighted flares, boat lanterns, and pennants, and the sound of cymbals and accordions. First come MASTER NOCIO, MITA, CURRAO, FILICO, and DORO; behind them are the make-believe brides and grooms: SIDORA with BURRANIA, QUANTERBA with LA DIA, NELA with TRENTUNO, MARELLA with BACCHI-BACCHI. The others follow them in disorder, half-drunk with wine, a truculent and disappointed look on their faces as if they were prepared already to find the party less fun than they had expected.)

At LA SPERA'S cry they stop, all bunched together, at the top of the cliff; then they start to walk down.)

LA SPERA. Wait! Wait! Stop where you are!

VOICES OF THE CROWD. Who's that?

Who is it?

What's it all about?

Who's shouting?

Go forward!

LA SPERA. Nol Stop, I tell you! And be silent! Order the music to cease, and listen to what I have to say!

VOICES FROM THE CROWD (*from the rear*). What is it? What's happening?
Come, come, let's go on!
Music! Music!

(*From the front*)

Silence! Silence!
It's La Spera!
Let's hear what she has to say!
Silence!
Don't bang those cymbals!

LA SPERA. Doro! Doro! Come here to me, Doro!
DORO. I?

LA SPERA. Yes, come over to me! Quickly!

MASTER NOCIO (*holding him back*). Nol Why to her?

LA SPERA. Don't keep him back! Let him come! It's for his own good.

(DORO *frees himself from his father's hand and runs to LA SPERA.*)

VOICES OF THE CROWD. Why?
Don't push!
Why did she call Doro?
What does she want with him?
Easy, easy there!
Let's go on with the celebration!
Let her make herself heard!
Up front with the wedding party!
A toast to the brides and grooms!
What's happening up there?
It's La Spera! La Spera!
Let her talk!

LA SPERA (*to DORO*). Stay here, Doro, with me! (*She turns*

to the rest.) I tell you there is a conspiracy afoot to kill this boy!

VOICES OF THE CROWD. Kill him? Who wants to kill him?

MASTER NOCIO. My son? Who wants to kill my son?

TOBBA. No, it isn't true! It isn't true!

CROCCO, PAPIA, and BURRANIA. Yes, it is! Yes, it is!

CURRAO (*leaping at CROCCO and throwing him to the ground*). You say it's true?

LA SPERA (*coming forward and pulling CROCCO out of CURRAO's hands*). No, I say so! I say it's true! (*To DORO.*) Doro, they want to kill you! (*To MASTER NOCIO and the rest.*) They want to kill him because they know (*turning to DORO*) that you'll never allow your sister to marry Currao—Currao who, in order to marry her, would take my son away from me.

CURRAO. You're telling me that I want to kill Doro?

TOBBA. It's not true! It's not true!

CROCCO and HIS COMPANIONS. Yes, it is true, it is true!
He's the one!

In order to get the boy out of his way!

And take everything!

To rule alone!

You can believe us!

CURRAO. No one can believe such a thing!

TOBBA. She doesn't believe it herself!

CURRAO (*to MASTER NOCIO*). You can't believe it; you are a witness—

MASTER NOCIO. No, I don't believe it! I don't believe it!

LA SPERA. Doro, stay by me!

CURRAO (*to CROCCO and his companions*). Then you're the ones!

CROCCO. Us?

CURRAO. Yes, you! You've put this vile idea in her head, you cowards!

CROCCO and HIS COMPANIONS. Not we! She was the one!

She did it!

She had a way of knowing better than anyone else.

She knew about the conspiracy! And she told us about it!

Just as she's telling you all now!

You heard her, didn't you? You can believe her!

CURRAO (*to LA SPERA*). You don't believe it! You can't believe it!

LA SPERA. Yes, I do! I believe it—if it's true, as Tobba says, that you want to take my son away! (*To TOBBA.*) That's true, Tobba, isn't it? That's what you told me!

TOBBA. Only if you consented to give him up, I told you!

CURRAO. But who told you that I wanted to kill Doro? They did, didn't they? (*He points to CROCCO and his companions.*) Admit it! They told you!

CROCCO and HIS COMPANIONS. (*partly to LA SPERA and partly to the rest*). We told you? Did we?

Speak up! Speak up!

Weren't you the one?

Didn't you tell us you wanted to report him?

And that you wanted to go back to your old trade?

Of course, you did! Yes, she invited us all to come see her!

LA SPERA. You cowards! All of you! Cowards! Cowards! Yes, it's true that they told me, in order to push me into accusing you!

CROCCO (*abusively*). You prostitute!

PAPIA. She's lying!

BURRANIA. Like the slut she is!

CURRAO (*protecting her*). Let no one touch her!

LA SPERA. They wanted to pin on you the very thing they were plotting themselves!

MASTER NOCIO (*to the sailors*). Get hold of that murderer and the other five of them!

(*The sailors lay hold of CROCCO and his companions, who struggle to get away.*)

VOICES OF THE CROWD. Hold them! Hold them!
The murderers! Tie them up! Throw them into the sea!

CURRAO. Wait! Wait! (*To LA SPERA.*) And why did you accuse me, then?

LA SPERA. To save Dorot! (*To MASTER NOCIO.*) To save your son! Now you won't let my son be taken away from me!

CURRAO. No! Now you'll give my son to me! (*He starts to snatch the baby from her arms.*)

LA SPERA (*rebellingly*). No! No!

CURRAO (*still threateningly*). Now I'm going to take him!

LA SPERA. No! No! Take care!

CURRAO. Give him to me! Give him to me!

LA SPERA (*running away to the top of the cliff*). No! He is mine! He is mine!

CURRAO (*pursuing her*). You'll give him to me! You'll give him to me! (*He catches up with her.*)

VOICES OF THE CROWD. She's not worthy to keep him!
She wants to be a prostitute again!
Give him to his father!

CURRAO. Give him to me!

LA SPERA. No! If you take him, the earth will tremble!

CURRAO. I'll snatch him out of your arms!

LA SPERA. Look! The earth is trembling!

(*As if it participated in the mother's desperate embrace, the earth does tremble.*)

THE CROWD (*in terror*). The earthquake! The earthquake!

(*But the cry is swallowed up by the sea, into which the island is sinking. Only the peak of the rocky promontory, on which LA SPERA has taken refuge with her child, emerges like a reef above the waves.*)

LA SPERA. Ah, my God, here I am, alone with you, my son, upon the waters!

WHEN SOMEONE IS SOMEBODY

CHARACTERS

xxx, Somebody

GIOVANNA, his wife

TITO, his son

VALENTINA, his daughter

CESARE, manservant

PIETRO, the nephew from America

NATASCIA, his wife

VEROCCIA, her sister

SCELZI, a critic

DIANA, SARCOLI and Two OTHER YOUNG ENTHUSIASTS OF DE-
LAGO

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN

CLERK OF A GRAMOPHONE COMPANY

POLICE COMMISSIONER

MOTHER SUPERIOR

CARLO, manservant of Pietro

TWO NUNS, SCHOOL BOYS and GIRLS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, GUESTS,
TWO HIRED WAITERS

ACT ONE

Scenes

1.

*Editorial office of PIETRO, an amateur publisher. A well-lighted room with few pieces of furniture (and those easy to fold and take away). On the rear wall is an enormous colored poster advertising in American style the book *The Girl on the Balcony*, lyrics by Delago. On both sides of the poster enlarged photographs hang with their backs to one another: on the right that of the girl striking up an attitude by now made famous because of the thousands of times it has been reproduced in papers and magazines; on the left that of the supposed Delago, a handsome youth in his early twenties, which might very well be a long-run youthful picture of xxx, which is neither known nor recognizable to anyone. On the right side of the room, instead of a wall, there is a glass partition which goes halfway up to the ceiling and does not quite touch the floor. This separates the publisher's office from that of his secretary, stenographers, and other employees, who are not there because it is Sunday. On the left side of the room is a sofa, two armchairs, and the stage entrance. In the middle of the stage is PIETRO'S desk, and we are to imagine that we are looking at it through an invisible window at the front of the stage.*

2.

At a certain point in the act this invisible fourth wall will be seen. That is, part of the external wall of the house with two rows of windows will come down from above, and in order to

give the audience the feeling of sudden change of perspective, the office window through which VEROCCIA will look for a moment will not be the one through which the audience saw before, but another further back to one side. In order to obtain this effect as quickly as possible, a ladder can be rapidly set up behind the falling curtain and the actress can climb up on it to look out the window.

3.

The magnificent entrance hall of the house with a wide stairway in the rear leading to the upper floors. The entrance is to be imagined as at the front of the stage, outside the curtain, under the two rows of windows of the outer wall. There are a few fine pieces of modern furniture which give the impression of something temporary, as if some strangers had temporarily set up housekeeping. (This third scene will be already prepared behind the first, because all the changes must be effected with rapidity.)

When the curtain goes up PIETRO and NATASCIA are on the stage, PIETRO writing at his desk and NATASCIA sitting on the sofa with her embroidery. PIETRO is about thirty years old, with thick hair and beard of a tawny color and a freckled face. He bursts into talking impetuously and then abruptly shuts himself up in expectant silence, with his eyes darting around the room. As soon as NATASCIA looks at him he runs to kiss her and calms down. NATASCIA is terribly calm. The mad ideas that go through her head are apparent only in the pattern of her embroidery, which is quite incomprehensible. She takes it all out in her embroidery and the rest of the time behaves like a good wife and affectionate sister. Silence. Then, all of a sudden, from the other side of the opaque glass partition comes a shout from XXX, whose hair VEROCCIA has unexpectedly cut into with a pair of scissors. The first part of the scene takes place alternately on both sides of the partition.

xxx. No, I say! Are you mad? What have you done!
 VEROCCIA (*vivacious and angry*). This way now, just wait!
 xxx (*rebellng*). What do you mean, this way! Put away
 those scissors!

VEROCCIA (*as before*). No! Once more! Once more!

xxx. Come on, please, Veroccia! Just look! You've cut a
 whole lock off!

VEROCCIA. And now just let me do another on this side.

NATASCIA (*getting up to see what is going on beyond the
 partition*). What is it? Oh, Good Lord, she's cut his hair!

PIETRO (*getting up to look too*). Ah yes. Good, Veroccia.
 Cut some more!

xxx (*from the other side*). No, no! That's enough.

PIETRO. Oh, but you can't stay that way now! Put your hands
 down and let's see.

xxx. Now that they're coming to get me . . . Can you imagine
 that?

VEROCCIA. That's just why I'm disfiguring you. For their
 benefit!

NATASCIA (*with a cry of apprehension*). Stop fooling with
 those scissors, Veroccia. You may hurt yourself.

PIETRO. No. Veroccia, go right ahead. Off with all that white
 hair!

VEROCCIA. I'll really have to cut the other side now.

xxx. I know that. But I don't want you to be the one to do
 it. Let me cut it myself!

VEROCCIA (*stamping her foot*). No, let me, let me!

NATASCIA (*going and pulling her away by force and bring-
 ing her onto the stage*). Come along, Veroccia, that's enough!
 Let him go! Come away!

VEROCCIA (*hardly twenty years old, with hed hair, a small,
 straight nose, and sparkling eyes, quivering all over as she is
 pulled onto the stage with the scissors still in her hands*). I'm

not just cutting off his hair, don't you see? I'm taking him out of himself, freeing him from that head of his . . .

PIETRO. . . . which belongs in the public domain. Like the head on a coin. (*He points to the photograph.*)

NATASCIA. His wife's coming. Are you mad? His children . . .

VEROCCIA. Exactly! Exactly! In order to prevent them from taking him back again.

xxx (*from the other side, injured*). Pietro, the scissors, please!

PIETRO. Give them to him, Veroccia!

VEROCCIA. No! He's quite capable of putting it in good order. I must cut it!

xxx. Of course I have to put my hair in order. Do you want me to show myself like this? Here there's not even a mirror!

VEROCCIA. I'm glad! (*She jumps onto a chair to look over at him.*) Aaah! (*laughing.*) He's looking at himself in the window.

NATASCIA. Give him a mirror, Pietro. And you give me the scissors!

VEROCCIA (*jumping down from the chair, to PIETRO, who has gone over to kiss NATASCIA before obeying her order*). No, don't you dare, Pietro! Yes, good! Go ahead and kiss Natascia. (*She darts back behind the partition with the scissors still in her hands.*) Don't worry. Leave it to me. I'll put it in order for you!

xxx. No, not you!

VEROCCIA. Then you'll be able to breathe. Your head will be light and your neck free.

xxx (*coming onto the stage*). Use discretion, now, for heaven's sake!

VEROCCIA. I wish for heaven's sake that they wouldn't recognize you any more. I ought to be the only one to put up with the fact that Delago still has a head like this! There, still now, just over this other ear!

xxx. Easy there!

VEROCCIA. Yes, easy . . . Wait. . . . Just a little more, like that. Doesn't he look like someone else entirely, Pietro?

PIETRO. To be Delago he ought to look at least twenty-five years younger.

VEROCCIA. That's not true. This is quite enough.

xxx (*passionately*). Tell me why God made you so beautiful.

VEROCCIA (*angrily*). Stop making eyes at me, or I'll scratch them out, do you hear? (*Stamping her foot exasperatedly.*) And don't smile at me like that!

NATASCIA. That's enough, Veroccia. You tease him too much!

VEROCCIA (*throwing the scissors on the floor*). I'm very sorry! Very sorry!

PIETRO. Shall I go get a mirror? (*And he leans over to kiss NATASCIA before he goes.*)

VEROCCIA (*coming back to herself and catching him at it*). Must you always be kissing? What must I do to stir him? To shake all that old crust off him? He looks like Bob, crawling under a bed to hide when they come to clip him.

xxx. I only wish I *could* hide, so that no one would ever see me again!

PIETRO (*coming back with a hand mirror and taking it behind the partition*). Here's a mirror. Look at yourself now.

xxx. Oh, my God, no! It's a massacre! I can't be like this! Just give me the scissors here!

VEROCCIA (*to NATASCIA*). To hide, did you hear him? It's all quite useless. Pick up the locks of hair, Pietro, and see if you can stick them back on his head. It's ridiculous to try to do anything with his hair if he hasn't any courage to start with.

xxx. Ridiculous, yes, it's ridiculous to mess me up like this. (*To PIETRO.*) I can't show myself to anybody.

PIETRO. Come, come! We must shorten it *in* the back too. You can't stay like this.

NATASCIA. Call Carlo, Pietro. You can't do it yourself.

PIETRO. Of course. That's the answer. Carlo was once a barber. Ring for him, Natascia.

(NATASCIA rings the bell.)

VEROCCIA (to PIETRO). No! Go to a hairdresser in the city with a lock of hair and a picture postcard of the great man! Perhaps he can make a wig before his wife and children and the rest get here . . .

(There is a knock at the door.)

NATASCIA. Come in.

VEROCCIA. . . . to put him back on the throne.

CARLO (coming in). Did you ring for me?

PIETRO (from behind the partition). Come here, Carlo. This is where we need you.

VEROCCIA. What an idea, Natascia! If only we could!

NATASCIA. What else has got into your mind now? That's quite enough.

VEROCCIA. No! Just listen! Just listen to me!

XXX (shouting angrily from the other side). No! What's that about shaving it close!

CARLO. Just look here. A chunk was taken out almost down to the scalp. If I even up the other side . . .

XXX. Then don't even it up, that's all. Try to patch up my appearance, cutting as little as you can. . . . A little in the back, and here on this side . . .

VEROCCIA (absorbed in her idea, as if she could see it before her). A wig and a mask and hands of wax . . . That would make a puppet . . . All dressed . . . with his cap stuck on his wig . . . It's HIMSELF—there—as if he were stuffed . . . Then they come and take him away. That's all they need of him anyhow, after what they've made of him.

XXX (bursting out from the other side). Don't you suppose I've thought of that?

CARLO. Still, please! If you wriggle like that . . .

xxx. That's enough. Did you clip it behind?

CARLO. Yes, but wait a minute!

xxx. Never mind, that's enough. It will grow back soon enough as soon as they come to get me, you'll see, with its old wave like that of falling wings behind the ears. (*He comes out from behind the partition. He is about fifty, but with his hair cut short and a summer shirt on, he is slender, agile, quick, and almost youthful in appearance.*) A puppet, yes! I've thought exactly the same thing, Veroccia.

VEROCCIA (*exulting*). Look at him, Natascia, look at him! Isn't he a different man? So young! That's the way I want to see your eyes smile.

CARLO. Is that all you need of me?

xxx. Yes, thanks.

PIETRO. He's Delago! There's no doubt of it, he's Delago!

xxx. Yes, with another man's hairs in the back . . .

NATASCIA. He looks twenty years younger!

xxx. It's I, not Delago. (*To VEROCCIA.*) But, if you like, then Delago . . . Do you know, Veroccia, how many times at night, in my study, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I thought of my body as a puppet to leave there at the desk under the light . . . with a wig, with face and hands of wax and glass eyes, motionless . . . while I silently slipped out of that shell and ran to you so that we should escape together, disappear!

PIETRO. Yes, all four of us together. Very good! Let's run away.

VEROCCIA (*clapping her hands*). Let's do it! Let's do it!

PIETRO. I'm sick of this adventure already.

NATASCIA. Let's all go back with him to America! Yes, yes!

VEROCCIA. I know how to model. I'll show you the wax mask and hands. I can just see you!

PIETRO. Do you know that I could have taken you for your brother!

VEROCCIA. Pietro, don't change the subject.

PIETRO. Yes, just look, Natascia; isn't he the spitting image of my father?

NATASCIA. You're right, he is!

PIETRO. Exactly the same head; I can see it now that he no longer has all that hair. (*Pointing to his temples.*)

(*To VEROCCIA.*)

No, not like Andrea. He's entirely different!

xxx. You called him Andrea, did you?

PIETRO. Yes, she called him Andrea too. That's her specialty, to treat old men as if they were little boys.

VEROCCIA. Who's an old man around here? Nobody's old! Old age is just an illusion. We're all like the earth, young and full of mischief.

xxx. Eighteen years . . . (*He runs his hand over his forehead.*) His head . . . Two years younger than me . . . How much he wanted me to go with him . . . His was a real escape, I can tell you . . .

VEROCCIA. As if your escape was going to be just a joke! I know! You haven't got it in your blood! You just haven't got it in your blood!

xxx. I couldn't bear to leave our parents all alone . . .

VEROCCIA. You see! Even then you were full of greatness and pity. But there's been enough of that. You can use it to stuff your puppet with. Delago doesn't need it; he must be altogether pitiless!

xxx. If I had gone then . . .

PIETRO. Then you too would be rich!

xxx. No, that's not it . . .

PIETRO. You'd be my father's partner and at least as rich as I am!

xxx. I'd be *nobody* . . . Can you imagine that . . . One of the crowd . . . Without feeling that people's eyes are on me and won't let me live!

VEROCCLIA. Go on! If you great men didn't have that . . .

xxx. Have what?

VEROCCLIA. If everyone didn't stare at you and admire you!

xxx. No thanks! If only I didn't have to go on living! Just try being well known and see if you want to live any longer!

PIETRO. If I were famous, I can assure you . . .

xxx. I'd like to see you. With eyes all around you, like so many mirrors. The great man goes by and they stare at you—stiffly—causing you to stiffen, reminding you of your “celebrity.” You're just a *statue*, don't you see? When you have something else on your mind and would like to give in for a moment to what you think and feel! When you'd like to lose your composure, to writhe with the pain that is within you. Good Lord, can't you aspire to the right to feel yourself a poor, mortal man? No, this right is denied you. . . . You can't be a *poor* man, because you're a *great* man. “Buck up, don't look so sad. They're watching you.” . . . Do you know that a month ago, a few days before I was allowed to come to you for a rest (just listen to this one!), I went out of the house furious, wandered about all day long—I can't say where, outside the city—until, since I had to have a bite to eat, I went into the first little restaurant I saw. I had forgotten—yes, I swear to you—absolutely forgotten in my trouble that I was “I,” and at a certain point, unable to stand the eyes of two young men who were staring at me and laughing every time I glanced up from my plate, I leaped to my feet shouting that if they didn't stop it I'd throw a bottle in their faces . . . and in fact I had taken hold of the bottle and was about to throw it.

PIETRO (*laughing*). Good! Capital! And what did they do?

xxx. You can laugh, can you? They seemed to disappear behind the table, and the next day they wrote me a letter of apology. They were staring because they couldn't believe I had stumbled into that little place; they were happy to have recognized me and didn't intend any offense.

PIETRO. Well, wasn't that enough?

xxx. Yes, indeed, the compensation of two idiots' enjoying themselves at your expense, and the satisfaction of knowing that you can't hide yourself even in an obscure little restaurant. But what do you expect it to matter to you if you suffer—if you *suffer*—from your fame and glory?

VEROCCIA (*spontaneously, almost with anger*). And why do you suffer?

xxx. You ask me why I suffer? You of all people? If I can't, without raising a scandal, do what anyone else would do in order to live—to live and breathe!

NATASCIA (*quietly, over her embroidery*). Then you'll go ahead and do it.

PIETRO. Scandal, that's it! Why, here everything becomes a scandal! Does Veroccia love you? It's a scandal! . . . But you must remember that neither Natascia nor myself would have come all the way from America if it hadn't been to make the acquaintance of this famous uncle of mine!

xxx. Yes, that now we want to make into a puppet to be left to whomever he may be useful, in my study, sitting at the desk . . . eh, Veroccia?

VEROCCIA (*meditatively*). I've just been thinking that there's a problem to be solved. He must be made to speak.

xxx. That's easy, my dear. Don't let a little thing like that worry you. We'll open him in the back and stick a gramophone in his belly.

VEROCCIA. Of course, very good . . . With a set of changeable records!

xxx. To repeat to distinguished visitors—

PIETRO. And newspapermen looking for an interview.

xxx. All those things that've already been settled I should go on repeating my whole life long. Not because I said them myself, but because others made me say them! Things I never dreamed of thinking myself.

PIETRO. You must have quite a few records already.

xxx. A lot, yes. All settled, I tell you. . . . Because from now on I must not think—or imagine—or feel anything else. No, no! I've thought what I have thought (according to them) and that's all there is to it. No other pictures of me are allowed. . . . I've expressed what I felt, and it's all right there. . . . I can't be any different. . . . Too bad if I should try . . . They wouldn't recognize me any longer. . . . I must not move from a certain concept, every detail of which they have decided upon: There I am, motionless, forever!

PIETRO. Dead!

xxx. If only I were dead! The damnable thing is that I'm still alive. That is something you can do only with dead men—and not even with dead men, I tell you! Because some of them, now long since gone, are lucky enough to have an occasional appointment with history, and then to live out the rest of their lives in freedom and obscurity! All they have to do is to appear punctually at an established date in order to do their memorable deed—April 12, 1426—October 15, 1571. . . . And who knows where they come from, what they did before or will do after—that is, if they don't die in doing the deed. . . . No one knows anything else about them! And even if they die after that one deed, someone may come to disturb them, and discover some new document which upsets the idea of them that had been preserved in history—brings some new facet of them alive, causes them to say something new—brings them back to life by letting them breathe in a new atmosphere!

PIETRO (*fierily*). Look here! Look here! Isn't that just what I've done for you? How ungrateful you are!

xxx. Ah, did you do it? Yes, because you suddenly became the publisher of the lyrics of Delago!

PIETRO. Excuse me, but didn't the same thing happen to you? (*Pointing to the colored poster.*) There you are . . . turned into someone else—into Delago—without anyone's being the

wiser. . . . Delago, the new glory, the beacon and banner of the young!

xxx. Oh yes, Delago, of course. . . . Delago. . . . But neither you nor anyone else made me come to life again as Delago, you must know. It's I that am still alive, that think and feel (*He takes VEROCCIA's face in his hands.*) Yes, because from the first instant these impertinent eyes brazened mine, so magically enkindling—(*blowing*) *Phhh* on the ashes: "Are you an old man? What are you trying to put over? You're still afire!" And your lips laughed in a way that I alone could see! One second was enough for you to search my eyes and find out that I was alive. Isn't that so? And if you were able to awaken me, that means there were alive in me thoughts and feelings, which I began immediately to express as if they were new, as if in a dream I had no right to believe in unless you believed it. You *did* believe, and now they are my whole life!

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

PIETRO. Who's there? Come in.

CARLO (*entering*). Two gentlemen and a young lady.

VEROCCIA. No, today's Sunday!

NATASCIA. And in the course of the morning we expect—

VEROCCIA. Let's stay alone if we're to put our heads together—

PIETRO. Who are they? Where are they?

CARLO. They're right here. (*Pointing behind the stage entrance.*)

xxx. I'll go away. (*He starts to retire behind the glass partition.*) I'm so—

PIETRO. Wait!

(*From the door SCELZI sticks his head out, followed by DIANA and SARCOLI, all three of them young. SCELZI, who is the foremost young literary critic, has a stoutish body, large head, and ponderous forehead. He keeps one eye shut, and the*

other is cross-eyed. He has to turn his purplish face from one side to the other. He is refined and witty, but in order to open up and understand someone he must inflict the pinpricks of his love of detail. DIANA is an adventurous young writer, attached for the moment to SARCOLI, painter, caricaturist, and young man of letters.)

SCELZI. Come, come, what "gentlemen"? It's me, Pietro, with Diana and Sarcoli!

PIETRO. Oh, you—come in, Scelzi, come in. You are Delago's friends and mine!

SCELZI (*surprised and disappointed, as he sees xxx*). Are, are you here, Maestro? (*Looking at his two companions.*) Well then—

PIETRO. Well then, what? He's my uncle, didn't you know that? He's here for another three weeks or so of vacation.

SCELZI. Yes, but . . . (*Looking again at his companions.*) Then it isn't true—

SARCOLI. I'd say that at least it's no longer probable.

PIETRO. What?

SCELZI (*to SARCOLI*). Have you the paper with you?

SARCOLI (*holding it out*). Yes, here it is.

SCELZI. To have come all this way.

(*At this point DIANA breaks out laughing, particularly over the Maestro's summery appearance.*)

SARCOLI. Oh, be quiet, Diana!

DIANA (*still laughing, pointing to the Maestro and indicating with her gestures rather than in words*). He—he—

SARCOLI. What about him? We see him . . .

PIETRO. What are you laughing about?

DIANA. I didn't mean to laugh. . . . Excuse me, Maestro. I'm laughing at the way they look. . . . They expected—And instead, here you are, with an air about you . . . (*She stares at him and bursts into laughter again.*) Hol Hol

PIETRO (*injured, leaping to his feet*). That's enough!

VEROCCIA (*indignantly*). Really!

NATASCIA (*astonished*). What does all this mean?

SCELZI (*furious at DIANA*). Be quiet, will you, or I'll shut you up!

DIANA (*containing herself*). Yes, that's enough. . . . Of course. . . . Youth—here for a vacation—

SARCOLI (*apologetically, trying to patch things up*). Youth! Youth!

SCELZI. What youth, you idiots? I have my dignity!

SARCOLI. No, really, you know, it was the contrast—with due apologies to the Maestro . . .

PIETRO. What in heaven's name did you come for, anyhow?

VEROCCIA. It's incredible!

SCELZI. Nothing at all! Just to find out. I was told that I should find Delago here in hiding with you!

PIETRO (*starting and looking instinctively at xxx*). Delago?

VEROCCIA (*bewildered*). Just think!

SARCOLI. Yes, just back from America. It was all in the paper.

SCELZI (*holding out the paper to PIETRO*). Do you see, he's to have landed in Genoa. (*Pointing to the place.*) Here, among the list of arrivals from America.

PIETRO (*looking*). Aboard the *Roma*? I don't know anything about it. Who could have given the paper such a piece of news?

NATASCIA (*impassively, going on with her embroidery*). Aboard the *Roma*? But you got a letter from him via the *Roma* just this morning.

PIETRO (*with a beatific and astonished smile, indicating to VEROCCIA and his uncle that NATASCIA has saved the situation*). She seems like the wisest of us all! Just look at her! How calmly she manages everything! (*He leans over to kiss her. Then he turns to the others.*) Yes, a letter came from him just

this morning. So, you see, he couldn't very well have arrived in person. Yes, it came with the *Roma*—

NATASCIA (*calmly*). Yes, it was stamped on the envelope—

SARCOLI (*to PIETRO*). But there's a piece about him in the paper, too: The poet Delago in Italy. It says that he has been seen and recognized . . .

NATASCIA. Then he's here . . . Just look for him!

PIETRO. Yes, in hiding, without my knowledge!

VEROCCIA (*looking at xxx*). Like in a children's puzzle! "Find Delago!"

SARCOLI. Are you joking?

PIETRO. What can I say—if you insist that he's here.

SCELZI. Come on! Just look at the satisfied smile of the Maestro—

xxx. —in order to understand that Delago can't be here. But why is he "satisfied"?

SARCOLI. Yes? Would you be pleased to see Delago here, raised to the skies by all of us young men?

VEROCCIA. Of course! He'd be more than pleased; he'd be happy. We know that better than anyone else. As happy as if you were doing it for his benefit!

DIANA. That's really handsome of him!

PIETRO. Handsome? It's only logical. The publication of Delago's lyrics is due entirely to him!

xxx. No, that's your merit . . .

PIETRO. Yes, the publicity I have given him. But the idea of publishing him here instead of in America—that came from you; there's no question of it.

xxx. That's only natural . . .

NATASCIA (*still calm*). It's the truth.

PIETRO. I brought with me things whose value I couldn't recognize—

VEROCCIA (*pointing to xxx*). He was the one!

PIETRO. —the lyrics of a young Italian boy, who even in

America has stuck to his native tongue . . . *He* advised me to publish them and told me that it would be better to launch him over here than there.

SARCOLI (*to xxx*). Did you foresee that among us young people this new poet—

xxx. —would raise such a frenzy. No, this perhaps . . .

SARCOLI. Do you see! You couldn't possibly have foreseen, after all, that we young people should have found in him our expression. Oh, I don't mean that for this reason you wouldn't have advised publishing him! But it was only human that you couldn't have so much foresight. And then it's significant that Delago should have found this way of expressing us all over there in America, where new forces are at play.

PIETRO (*seated, with one arm around VEROCCIA's waist and the other hand on NATASCIA's shoulder*). You can feel that, without ever having been in America, in the presence of the three of us!

SARCOLI. Of course: Russia, America, a new birth of humanity! . . . But he's been there long enough now. It's time he came to us. And it's up to you to bring him here, whatever the cost.

SCELZI. Yes, now it's your job to persuade him of that.

DIANA. Force him, I say! Force him!

SARCOLI. He can't go on staying so far away, he simply can't! He must know something of the conflagration he's started!

DIANA. We're waiting for him as if he were a Messiah!

PIETRO. Ah, but for all this year—

VEROCCIA. He won't come! We shall go over there. We'll transfer our abode and go to be with him! (*So saying, she slips her hand into xxx's arm.*)

SCELZI. You too, Maestro?

xxx. I don't really need to go see anyone . . .

SCELZI. How do you mean? I'm not such a fan as the others, but I seriously believe that Delago is ahead of everybody; he's

gone so far ahead that none of his elders can catch up with him, that's quite certain; in fact, we can bury the question. Yes! There are some things in Delago I can't and don't admire, but I find in him something way above and beyond anything that was ever done before. Just look at his "mode"! No, I'm not joking! I mean "mode" in the musical sense of the term. His "mode" and hence his whole lyric production is new; it has a new rhythm of breathing (yes, because in it life has a different pulsation) that makes yours seem incoherent, wasted breath. You must have felt for yourself the new life in it.

xxx. Yes, I felt that it was . . . life . . .

SCELZI. Like the voice of life itself that overpowers and silences all others. There you are! We must resign ourselves to it. (*Turning to PIETRO*). And *we* must resign ourselves to having made this trip in vain. Did you know that you seem to be far away? It's plain that you've come from another world.

VEROCCIA. And we shall go back there! We shall go back!

SCELZI. What? Nonsense! Persuade Delago to leave everything and come here!

SARCOLI. Because we can't get along without him. You'd already promised us that. That's why we believed the story of his arrival when we read it in the paper.

SCELZI. I came to interview him and Sarcoli to make a sketch.

DIANA. And I to feast my eyes upon him!

SARCOLI. And we ran all the way in order to be the first. You'll see how many others are coming.

PIETRO. Oh, no, for the love of heaven! Please spread word that the news is not true.

SARCOLI. Even so, until tomorrow—

DIANA. They'll all be rushing here!

PIETRO. I'll put up a sign at the entrance.

SCELZI. They won't believe it.

SARCOLI. Perhaps if you say that the Maestro is here as your guest—

xxx. Then all the young people—

SARCOLI. No, forgive, Maestro. I only say so, because you've seen how it was with us . . .

xxx. How if I'm here, then he can't possibly be here too.

SCELZI (*making his farewells*). Signora . . . Signorina . . . My respects, Maestro. . . . Good-by, Pietro . . .

(*The others chime in, and SCELZI, SARCOLI, and DIANA go away. PIETRO, VEROCCIA, and NATASCIA are silent for a moment, exchanging amused glances.*)

PIETRO. That's a good one! Who's been passing himself off as Delago in Genoa?

xxx. Another imposture!

NATASCIA (*to PIETRO*). Oh, it wasn't you that gave out the news?

PIETRO. Not I! (*To xxx, shrugging his shoulders.*) Imposture? . . . Of course we must make people believe that Delago may arrive from one moment to the next from America, and we must invent —

xxx. Of course! And you're going very far with it, it seems to me. With considerable enjoyment in fact. But you shouldn't take such advantage of me!

VEROCCIA. We? Of you?

xxx. Yes, of the fact that it's impossible for me to shout out—

PIETRO. Come, come! To shout out! . . . Do you want to give the whole thing away? Weren't we all in agreement?

VEROCCIA (*rebelliously*). Do you say that *I* am taking advantage of the fact that you can't give yourself away?

xxx. No. All I say is that the least you can do is not to joke so much about it in front of me.

VEROCCIA. Do you accuse me of joking? I almost did give you away!

xxx (*still talking to the others*). Yes, but you take pleasure in almost giving me away, just because you're so very sure that no one will ever take me for Delago . . .

PIETRO. Ugh! I can't say it's a pleasure—

xxx. Yes, a shameless pleasure; only for me it's a sorry joke. You feel quite safe in betraying me under my very eyes, of stripping me of my whole life in order to make me put on another!

VEROCCIA. But what if I want you to actually *be* Delago for everyone! You feel that's impossible because you want to hide in your old shell, and yet now that you're aware of suffocating in it, you cry aloud!

PIETRO. It's as if this other one weren't himself, that's what you mean.

xxx. That's not true. I myself? Haven't you seen? I can't be "myself"; I mustn't be "myself"!

VEROCCIA. Why mustn't you: Shout it out to everybody that you're Delago!

xxx. Yes? You want me to shout it out? Don't you see that I'd be killing him?

VEROCCIA. Whom would you be killing?

xxx. Delago!

VEROCCIA. Why?

xxx. Because I'm not Nobody; I'm *Somebody*, as I've already told you. That's what my "self" means to the public, and I can't be anything else. If I reveal myself to be Delago, if I shout it to the whole world, then good-bye! Delago is done for! He's just a mask, don't you see? A mask of youth that I've put on for a joke . . . (*With passionate anger.*) I can't have any flesh and blood; I can't have any life of my own; I can't have even what belongs to me. You, Veroccia, my own living thing, my living youth! No, no! You must belong to Delago, not to me! Now do you understand? (*To the others.*) But at least don't amuse yourselves by building him up in front of my

eyes, don't make him so real that I'm jealous of him! Yes, jealous! Do you see what you're doing? Didn't you see? You make me hate him! They set him up against me! They stood him up to me, face to face! He's the one that's alive, and he's killing me! Did you hear them? "That's quite settled . . . we can bury the question." They've buried me. He speaks with a "new voice" and I am silenced! . . . But I'll take it back, I tell you! I'll take back what belongs to me! Just leave it to me and you'll see if I don't take it back! (*Staring at them.*) Now you're looking at me as if you were staring into the sun . . . But I shan't tell you. I shan't tell you any more. Just leave it to me.

(At this point there is heard something like the glorious blast of a trumpet. xxx sinks suddenly back, while the others look surprised.)

There they are to get me.

VEROCCIA. Is that the horn of the car? What a beautiful sound.

PIETRO. Strange! It sounded like a trumpet to me.

xxx (*bitterly and ironically, standing still, with closed eyes*). Of course! It's fame! How else should fame announce itself? It springs winged from my wife's breast and can't help sounding the trumpet.

PIETRO. No, no. It must be some other wild enthusiasts sounding a trumpet for Delago. Look out the window, Veroccia. (*He motions in front of him with his hands.*)

(VEROCCIA, who has been standing in the rear, comes to the front of the stage, where PIETRO has pointed to the window, and as she advances, the façade of the house, with two rows of windows, comes down. But his gesture and the direction she takes do not correspond to the point where the study window is actually located on the façade. If there are four windows, two above and two below, VEROCCIA will lean out the one at

the right of the upper row. Looking at the house from the outside, that is the position of PIETRO's office.)

VEROCCIA (*looking down from the window*). Yes, here they are. (*She makes a negative gesture to PIETRO's question as to whether she means more newspaper reporters.*) No, no, it's his family. (*Then she looks again and announces.*) And some others with them, five in all. First there's Tito. Then the publisher, what's his name? Modoni. Then a gentleman I didn't know . . . Wait . . . Oh, Good Lord, yes, it's the Cabinet Minister Giaffredi. . . . Then comes Valentina. And now they're helping down your aunt. (*She raises her arms and draws a deep breath as if she were drinking in the sky.*) What a shame! On such a lovely morning! (*She draws back from the window.*)

(*The façade has been pulled up again. Now we are in the hallway, into which have just come the visitors announced by VEROCCIA. At first sight they all have their backs to the audience, because they supposedly came in from the front part of the stage, where, corresponding to the outside windows we have just seen, we imagine the front door. GIOVANNA, the wife, is statuesque, a shapely but stiff personification of her husband's official glory. She has a low forehead, austere, solemn, oval eyes, a large, imperious nose, and a prominent chin; she is dressed in black and silver. VALENTINA, the daughter, around thirty years old, seems quite unapproachable, like a figure that has fallen out of a picture, painted with meticulous artificiality. On her face is a dreamy expression. TITO, the son, is husky but short; he has a gloomy and bilious air, and when he has said "Father," he has nothing more to say. GIAFFREDI, the Cabinet Minister, is a man of fifty, gray-haired, but gallant without affectation. He has an authoritative but smiling way of talking, as if he were so used to being deferred to that he could not imagine anyone's failing to obey. He is accustomed to living in high political and financial circles and to being regarded as*

a powerful and condescending friend. He overlooks the oddities of writers as long as they do what he says. MODONI, the publisher, is about sixty, with the face of an intelligent Jew; he cleverly pretends to be generous, but is in reality shrewd.)

GIAFFREDI. What a lovely place!

GIOVANNA. That's easy, with the money they have . . .

MODONI. Very rich, are they?

VALENTINA. Looks like it—

TITO. Can't you see from the way he publicized Dedalus how he throws his money around?

MODONI. Yes, he certainly has publicized him well. There's no doubt about that.

GIOVANNA. But how does it happen that no one's coming down? Shall we blow the horn again?

GIAFFREDI. Is it really his nephew?

GIOVANNA. Yes, his brother's son.

TITO. Incredible! He has the same last name—

GIAFFREDI. What's incredible about that?

TITO. That with the same last name he should be the publisher of this Dedalus.

VALENTINA. Delagol Delagol!

TITO (*correcting himself*). Delagol Delagol!

VALENTINA (*irritated*). Take some care! You're always saying Dedalus.

TITO. I do it on purpose.

GIOVANNA. Here we are in the middle of the hall and no one has come to tell us to make ourselves comfortable. It may be very lovely here, but I can't wait to get away from it. And we have no time to lose. You go on ahead, Modoni. Where's the manuscript?

MODONI. Here it is.

GIOVANNA. A pretty mess! It makes me sick just to see it. Go, go! (*To GIAFFREDI.*) Don't speak of it in front of me. I might

say something I'd regret. (*To MODONI.*) Be firm, eh? No weakness. It's no, no, no!

MODONI. But don't you think it would be a good idea if His Excellency were to go with me?

GIOVANNA. Your contract gives you full authority, Modoni. Just stand on that and you're safe.

GLIAFFREDI. If you need me, Modoni, of course I'll come speak to him. Or let him come down. Why doesn't he come down, by the way?

MODONI (*holding a large manuscript in his hands as if he were weighing it.*) You'll understand, Your Excellency, with what I know is in the offing, to give up . . . My heart bleeds, I assure you. But never mind. I've never taken money into consideration. And I hope he'll take that into account. (*He goes upstairs.*)

GLIAFFREDI. No compromise, remember! And remember that if you need me, I'm here.

GIOVANNA. Poor fellow, he's quite right . . . The new piece of work, which he had been waiting to have fall from heaven—

TITO. That was to be a second altar—

GLIAFFREDI. And then this betrayal! It's incredible!

TITO. Incredible!

GLIAFFREDI. Excuse me, Giovanna. (*Taking her aside.*) No, I mean if he's so rich and a relative, a nephew, couldn't we try . . . to make him give up his publishing office and this Delago—

GIOVANNA. Yes, and how?

GLIAFFREDI. I thought—mightn't he be a good match for our Valentina?

GIOVANNA. No, God help us! What are you saying? He came from America with two wild young Russian women he found there—

GLIAFFREDI. That doesn't mean— If only we could—

GIOVANNA. It does too mean something. One of them's his wife.

GIAFFREDI. Oh, one of them's his wife—

GIOVANNA. And then after what he's done. Is that so little? He came all the way from America on purpose, didn't he, Tito?

TITO. What's that, Mother?

GIOVANNA. His Excellency was speaking of Pietro (*softly*) as a match for Valentina—

TITO. But he's married!

GIAFFREDI. I didn't know. But those American marriages—

TITO. A divorce? No, no! He's head over heels in love—they're very close to one another. . . . And there's her sister—three mad creatures . . .

GIOVANNA. And then I say that after what he's done—

TITO. Yes—he came over purposely in order to meet Father, and then he appears all of a sudden as the publisher of young writers, with a barrage of American advertising—bang! Delago! Delago! And sets him up against Father.

GIAFFREDI. Who is this Delago, anyhow?

TITO. A friend of his in America. And the most remarkable thing is this, Your Excellency. They set him up against Father, and yet I can prove that he has read Father and copied him.

(PIETRO comes cheerfully down the stairs.)

PIETRO. Ah, here's Tito with his accusation of "he copies Father"!

TITO. He does copy him, I say! And I tell you I can prove it. I can show you exactly where and how many times, word for word!

VALENTINA. Tito had the energy to read him through quite dispassionately.

GIOVANNA (*as if TITO had done something unbelievable*). Yes? You did? Really?

TITO. Yes, and I found the plagiaries. Half a dozen of them!

GIOVANNA (*to GIAFFREDI*). Now! Do you hear? And then we should put up with such an enormity.

PIETRO. Yes, a wonderful coincidence. I heard about it upstairs. That in his new book he's imitating Delago! Modoni is beside himself! It's a triumph for Delago and me!

GIOVANNA. No, my dear fellow! Don't shout victory too soon. We're here, and that's exactly why. This new book of his won't be published.

PIETRO. If Modoni doesn't publish it, I will!

GIAFFREDDI (*intervening authoritatively*). Ah, no! You won't publish a thing!

PIETRO. And who may you be, please?

GIAFFREDDI. Don't even think of it, I tell you!

GIOVANNA. This is His Excellency Luciano Giaffredi, of the Cabinet.

PIETRO. Honored, I'm sure. But I was born in America.

GIAFFREDDI. Yes, I can see that, in America.

PIETRO. Yes, but I grew up to be so Italian that I obliged my wife and sister-in-law, who are foreigners, to speak the language. And they speak it better than I do.

GIAFFREDDI. Russian, are they?

PIETRO. Yes, sir, Russian. But they have no political background and they're quite in order with the law. I said I was born in America just so that you'd understand that for me a Cabinet Minister—

GIAFFREDDI. You don't realize that I don't need the authority of my office in order to make myself the guardian, along with Family and Country, of a fame that has been consecrated by an entire generation. You cannot be allowed to besmirch either his reputation or his person (*pointing upstairs*), particularly when at my suggestion the Nation is preparing to honor his fiftieth birthday.

PIETRO. As his nephew, I'm proud and happy, but surely no one can be allowed to forbid him to publish his latest book.

GIAFFREDDI. Yes, we are forbidding it, and quite rightly so, out of the respect we bear him and his name.

PIETRO. A fine sort of respect I call it!

GIAFFREDI. Because he mustn't lose his head at the very moment that it's about to be crowned.

PIETRO. Crowned? How do you mean, crowned? Ah, they're crowning him?

GIAFFREDI. Oh, not with a symbolical wreath of laurel, such as in small towns they bestow upon singers or hang upon public monuments. No, a real crown of nobility, which the Nation is offering him in recognition of his glory. The crown and title of a Count.

GIOVANNA. Hereditary, of course!

PIETRO (*coldly*). . . . Ah! . . . (*Looking at Tito.*) So you'll be a Count too . . .

TITO. And I assure you I shall respect—

PIETRO. Of course you will! I'm very sure of that! And you (*bowing to Giovanna*) a Countess, and you too (*bowing to Valentina*)—that is, on condition that he consents not to publish his new book. (*He waves his hand in the direction of the stairs in order to show that he is speaking of the manuscript carried up there by MODONI.*) I understand.

GIAFFREDI. This new book, if you must know, has been weighed and examined word for word by his most faithful friends and admirers, who are legion, and they have unanimously judged it—

PIETRO. Infected with the new and youthful inspiration of Delago—and hence *strictly forbidden!* Very good. O.K.! O.K.! (*He pirouettes about.*)

GIAFFREDI. At his age he mustn't wander off into incoherent experiments!

GIOVANNA. . . . He mustn't make a spectacle of himself, by stooping to pick up—

TITO. —the voice of his enemy and echoing it himself!

GIAFFREDI. He must come back to be his real self! Be serene in his established and well-defined celebrity. If he still has

something more to say, then he must say it in words that can be sculptured in stone!

(*VEROCCIA appears at the head of the stairs and calls down, leaning over the banister.*)

VEROCCIA. Pietrol Pietrol Come herel

GIOVANNA (*looking up*). What's this? Where are we?

VEROCCIA. It's bullying! Come herel

PIETRO. Here I am!

(*And he starts to go quickly up the stairs just as NATASCIA comes calmly down.*)

GIOVANNA. Then I'm going up too. This has all the earmarks of a conspiracy.

GIAFFREDI. No, let me go, Giovanna. I'll do it.

GIOVANNA. They've imprisoned him, don't you see? And driven him out of his mind.

GIAFFREDI. Quiet there, quiet there! I'll bring him around. (*He starts up.*)

GIOVANNA. Bring him downstairs, for heaven's sake, so that we can all go. I can't stand it here a minute longer. (*And as GIAFFREDI goes up the stairs, she adds, turning to her children:*) The strange thing is how he ever came here and turned himself over to this house full of madmen and enemies!

NATASCIA (*without losing her self-control*). Thank you, Auntie, for your appreciation of our hospitality and care. He's a very sick man, if you must know.

GIOVANNA (*shrugging her shoulders*). Sick—sick—that was his excuse for coming to make a fool of himself here.

NATASCIA. It was no excuse. He's really ill.

GIOVANNA (*brushing aside the remark*). Oh, yes, he has a bit of a weak heart . . .

TITO (*concerned*). He hasn't been taken ill upstairs now, has he?

NATASCIA. No, not from his heart. He is suffering from a malady that is truly terrible, especially at a certain age.

VALENTINA (*annoyed*). What malady?

NATASCIA. Youth, my dear!

VALENTINA. You've infected him with it!

NATASCIA. That may very well be.

GIOVANNA (*looking at her in astonishment*). The way she says it!

NATASCIA. But he must have had it in him already. I said it just the way one says anything that happens to be a fact. And I say too that all of you who call us his enemies are really his worst enemies yourselves.

GIOVANNA. We are? And you have the nerve to say it to my face?

NATASCIA. Not nerve, just courage, because it's the truth. You are committing a crime. You're all of you living on top of him and choking him.

GIOVANNA. That's quite enough!

TITO. It's absolutely unheard of!

VALENTINA. We must get out of here!

GIOVANNA (*to TITO*). Go up right away; tell him that they're insulting me and that if he doesn't come straight down I'm going away.

(TITO goes upstairs.)

NATASCIA (*calmly*). He can't come straight down. You must give him time to dress like an old man again. He was just dressing when Signor Montoni—

(*At this mispronunciation VALENTINA bursts into angry laughter.*)

GIOVANNA. Modonil Modonil That's his publisher, and the best in the country, if you want to know.

NATASCIA. Since I'm a foreigner, I may be forgiven for my ignorance.

GIOVANNA. And since you're a foreigner, we may run you out of town for sticking your nose into our affairs!

(*Talking in loud and angry tones, MODONI and PIETRO come down the stairs, followed by GIAFFREDI and TITO.*)

MODONI. Nol Ah, no! That will never be. In that case I'll take him back. (*And he snatches the manuscript from PIETRO'S hand.*)

PIETRO (*grasping it*). With brute force? No, I tell you! Give it back to me!

MODONI. I'll not give it back! I'll not give it back if you dare to deny me—

PIETRO. You'll give it back because he himself turned it over to me!

GIAFFREDI. Go on, Modoni, give it back to him. He can't do anything with a manuscript like that, after all

TITO. He can't publish it!

PIETRO. Of course I can't if he doesn't want me to—

MODONI. No, the reason you can't do it is that I have exclusive rights to all his works, past, present, and future!

PIETRO. Even the right to forbid him to give another publisher something that you've turned down? No, sir, you can't have that right.

MODONI. But it's not on my account that I'm turning it down. It's on his. In his own best interest. It would be to my advantage to publish it. It's his friends, the Minister here, and the family who have persuaded me not to go ahead. They're afraid of a scandal, but to me, his publisher, that would be a godsend. There's something that you, as an American, can understand. I'm a victim and you're trying to cast me in the role of a bully. Here's the manuscript for you! You can have it! (*And he throws it contemptuously into PIETRO'S hands.*)

GIOVANNA. What's it all about? What's happened?

GIAFFREDI. Nothing, Giovanna. I'll explain.

TITO (*softly, to his mother in order to reassure her*). Have no fear. We've won.

GIAFFREDI (*to MODONI, accusingly*). Excuse me, Modoni, but you were the first to warn us—

MODONI. Yes, I admit that, because when I started to read it I had an uneasy feeling, and with the respect I feel for my best author I knew it was my duty to warn his family and friends . . . But all this was against my own interest. Now you can see that I don't want someone else to step in and reap the profit.

GIOVANNA. Oh, are we still—

GIAFFREDI. Nol

TITO (*at the same time*). Nol

GIAFFREDI. No one's going to take any advantage away from you, Modoni—don't worry. He himself gave up. Not only for our sake but for that of the whole country, which loves him so well and is going to show it.

GIOVANNA. But the manuscript?

PIETRO (*proudly*). It stays here with me. In my keeping!

GIOVANNA. Nol Why should it?

GIAFFREDI. Never mind; leave it! He wanted them to read it. We can't prevent that. It's of no importance. They can't do anything with it.

GIOVANNA. But they might take a notion to show all the disciples of the new writer how he demeaned himself . . .

NATASCIA. Don't be afraid of that, because in our opinion he hasn't in the least demeaned himself . . .

PIETRO. Well spoken, Natascial

GIAFFREDI. To us, on the contrary, this book is a symptom of a deplorable restlessness, caused by a momentary loss of direction. He is suffering, that can't be denied. And he is weakened. When I put my hand on his shoulder to thank him for giving the thing up, I swear to you that I could feel his bones all

collapsing together. (To GIOVANNA.) You must be careful of his heart, my dear.

TITO. Here he comes now!

(XXX appears on the stairs, not as we have seen him before, but as we should naturally expect him to have become after what we have heard on the stage since his family and friends arrived. He seems to have gone back into the changeless and universally known image we saw in the enlarged photograph in Pietro's office. In fact, it even looks as if his hair had grown back. The actor taking the part has put on a new wig, but as he starts down the stairs the two long locks that give a falling-wing effect behind his ears are hidden by his famous wide-brimmed hat. All the others move silently toward the rear of the stage as he comes slowly down, pale and as if he were as stiff and deaf as stone. When he has come all the way down, VEROCCIA appears at the top, her eyes red and swollen with tears. She holds on to the banister as if to brace herself against her feelings. The front door is to be imagined in the forefront of the stage.)

GIOVANNA (coming forward). Do you feel unwell?

XXX. No, no, it's all over now. It's nothing at all. Let us go.

GIOVANNA. Wait. Good Lord, dear, what have you done to your hair? (She lifts off his hat and runs her hand over his hair, first to one side and then the other, and the long locks seem to grow under her touch. She gazes at him and so do the others.) There. That's the way your head is.

(Then he first and the others following after move with deathlike solemnity toward the front of the stage. But from the top of the stairs VEROCCIA breaks the silence with a piercing cry.)

VERROCCIA. Hurrah for Delago! Hurrah for Delago!

(*He pauses for a second, as if he has been struck in the back; with a terrible struggle he opens his tight, pale lips in a smile of mingled joy and sorrow.*)

GIOVANNA. This is shameless!

GIAFFREDI. What insolence!

VEROCCIA (*as before*). Hurrah for Delago! Hurrah for Delago!

GIAFFREDI (*to PIETRO, who is laughing happily*). Make her be quiet!

GIOVANNA. Come along! Come along! You'll never set foot in this house again!

(*He keeps going on slowly toward the front of the stage, and while VEROCCIA, leaning painfully over the banister, shouts more and more frantically: "Hurrah for Delago! Hurrah for Delago!" the curtain falls.*)

ACT TWO

xxx's library in his own house. The air is heavy with old prints, and the room has a church's stiffness and formality; there is a feeling of stagnation and oppression. The walls are covered with bookshelves, interrupted only by a door on either side and a fireplace to the right. In the center of the rear wall is a sort of niche containing xxx's massive chair and rectangular table covered with books and papers. On one side is a lamp and on the other a bust of xxx a little smaller than life size, with the head leaning on the right fist, which is clenched against the forehead. In front of the bookshelves on the left wall are a worn leather couch and two leather armchairs with a small table between them. Two more armchairs stand before the fireplace on the right side. Three-quarters of the way up the walls a narrow platform runs all around the room. Off this, among the books, are four portraits of famous poets, two on the rear wall and one on either side. They are painted on the doors of four set-in cases supposed to contain rare books. The interiors of these cases are barely visible through the half-open doors because the view is blocked by the railing around the platform. The portraits are those of Dante and Ariosto to the right and left sides of the rear wall, and of Foscolo and Leopardi on the right and left side walls respectively.

When the curtain goes up, the stage is in a heavy, thick, morbid, dreamlike yellow light shot through with violet, and xxx is asleep in his chair with his head propped up on his right hand exactly as it is in the bust on the front of his table. He seems to be made of wax, like the puppet imagined by VEROCCLA. On the platform around the walls we see, as if they

had stepped out of their portraits, the likenesses of Dante, Foscolo, Ariosto and Leopardi gesticulating one to another against the silence of the room. Foscolo excitedly motions with upraised arm and open hand to persuade Dante to say a word for Italy's new destiny, but Dante, with contemptuous gloom, shrugs his shoulders and shakes one finger in a negative reply. Leopardi shakes his head and opens his arms in disconsolate despair, as if to say that all is vanity, while Ariosto, with a knowing and indulgent smile, seems to encourage him to philosophize and be of good cheer. This scene lasts for only a moment, until there is a knock on the door in the right wall. xxx barely moves, but enough to banish the subject of his dream, and the likenesses of the four poets open up their doors and disappear inside them. There is another and louder knock at the door, and although xxx wakes up, he is still half uncertain as to whether he has really heard it. During this moment of uncertainty the dreamlike light vanishes and cold daylight takes its place.

xxx. Come in.

(Enter CESARE, the old manservant. He has a dignified air. Because he is worried about something he speaks in a low voice.)

CESARE. It's the clerk from the new gramophone company to see Your Excellency.

xxx *(first stares, then thinks it over, then speaks in a tired voice)*. Very well, show him in.

(The CLERK comes in with a portable gramophone in one hand and an album of six records in the other.)

CLERK. Allow me to pay you my respects, Maestro. I've brought you the recording of "My Four Poets."

xxx. Oh, is it ready so soon?

CLERK. Your own voice. You'll hear . . . *(He puts the gramo-*

phone down on the small table near the couch and speaks as he winds it up.) It's come out perfectly clear. Splendid, in fact. I think you were to have three, but the company has sent you six, and if you want any more . . .

xxx. One's quite enough, I assure you. Too many, to tell the truth.

CLERK. Here we are. (*He starts to twirl the record.*)

RECORD (*with the voice of xxx*). Dante. (*Pause.*) Ariosto. (*Pause.*) Foscolo. (*Pause.*) Leopardi. (*Pause.*) Four natures which, all unconsciously, had to obey the necessities of their time. If Foscolo tries to persuade Dante to say a word for Italy's new destiny, and Dante, enfolded in his merciless passion, refuses him—

xxx. That's enough. Take it off, for the love of heaven!

CLERK (*immediately lifting the needle*). You're not pleased?

xxx. No, my voice, shut up in there, speaking all by itself . . . It's beautifully done, of course, but I can't bear it. Leave the records here and thank the company on my behalf. Who knows if they may not really be useful to me . . .

CLERK (*astonished*). What did you say?

xxx. Nothing. I am really the voice of this library of mine.

CLERK. You'll see that they sell like hot cakes, Maestro. Once more, my respects.

xxx. Good-by.

(*The CLERK bows and goes, with his gramophone. CESARE, dignified as ever, comes back.*)

CESARE. For Your Excellency—

xxx (*impatiently*). Never mind about "Your Excellency"!

CESARE. Madame ordered me—

xxx. When did she give you such an order?

CESARE. A short time ago, Your Excellency. In fact, she told me that it was only temporary, until you receive another title. Upon which, as your devoted servant, I humbly—

xxx. All right, all right . . . Who's there now?

CESARE (*in the same tone as before, dropped a little, but still as if nothing had happened*). A group of young people to see Your Excellency.

xxx. Young people? For me? Who are they?

CESARE. From the newspapers, they say.

SCELZI (*sticking his head through the door as he did in the First Act*). It's me, Maestro, with a few friends, if you'll allow me.

(*A noise of voices comes through the door. Those of SARCOLI and DIANA are recognizable, but the loudest are those of the FIRST AND SECOND ENTHUSIASTS of Delago.*)

FIRST ENTHUSIAST. No, it's immoral, positively immoral.

DIANA. It's laughable, that's all.

SARCOLI. He brands a whole generation.

SECOND ENTHUSIAST. Who's he making fun of, anyhow?

xxx (*to SCELZI*). What do they want?

SCELZI (*occupying the door and warning those still outside*). If you'll stop that racket!

CESARE (*to xxx*). Shall I send them away?

xxx. No. Wait.

SCELZI (*to the others who excitedly follow him*). I'll do the talking.

xxx. An invasion—

SARCOLI (*impetuously*). Yes, so that you'll see—

SCELZI. Quiet there, Sarcoli!

SARCOLI. No, with all due respect—

xxx (*to SARCOLI*). So that I'll see what?

SARCOLI. That it's not right to trifle with young people's enthusiasm!

xxx. Trifle? I don't understand. What has happened?

FIRST ENTHUSIAST. He wants to go on with it!

SECOND ENTHUSIAST. No, no!

SARCOLI. We've had enough!

DIANA. I frankly enjoy it!

XXX. You can go, Cesare. (*And as CESARE, transfigured by his dignity, goes away, he turns to the young people.*) What's it all about?

FIRST ENTHUSIAST. We're all very much upset—

SARCOLI. No, worse than that, indignant!

XXX. Do you dare to speak in such terms in front of me?

SECOND ENTHUSIAST. Yes, indignant about something highly immoral—

FIRST ENTHUSIAST. About a cheap trick played by Pietro—

XXX. Pietro? What has he done?

FIRST ENTHUSIAST. A swindle! A swindle!

XXX (*astounded*). A swindle?

SCELZI (*angrily*). Never mind about the big words! Can't we understand one another even among ourselves?

DIANA (*bursting out laughing as she did in the first act*). Delago . . . Delago . . .

SARCOLI. Quiet, Diana, or I'll send you away!

DIANA. It's so funny! So very funny!

XXX (*answering her proudly*). What's so funny?

DIANA. But we too, Maestro . . . I myself, who believed you . . . I actually admire you for this colossal joke . . .

XXX. Joke? What do you mean? I don't know a thing about it!

SCELZI. Come now, excuse me! You don't know that your nephew has brought out just today a new volume of Delago?

XXX. I don't know it at all? Pietro, you mean? What volume is it?

FIRST ENTHUSIAST (*derisively*). *The New Voice* . . .

SARCOLI (*holding out the book*). You see? *New lyrics by Delago* . . .

XXX (*with spontaneous surprise*). But this book is mine!

ALL (*except SCELZI*). We know it!

Oh, by this time!
That's nothing new!
We know it very well!

SCELZI (*showing a bundle of proofs that he has brought with him*). I have the proofs. Look here! They were sent me a week ahead for publicity purposes.

XXX (*overcome, as if to himself*). . . . Published under the name of Delagol

FIRST ENTHUSIAST (*pointing him out to the others*). He's pretending not to know anything about it!

XXX (*still to himself*). . . . He dared do such a thing?

SARCOLI. Because *you* are Delagol

SECOND ENTHUSIAST. Do you still want to lie low?

DIANA. It's no use, because he's told us . . .

XXX. Who has told you?

SARCOLI (*and all the others except SCELZI*). He himself! Pietrol

XXX (*to himself*). Foolish fellow!

SCELZI (*as if to stave off his companions*). No! Just wait! Because in the course of a discussion I showed these proofs to someone who had read the manuscript, and he jumped on me in a state of terrific excitement and said that the book was not Delago's but yours, and that you had rejected it!

XXX. Rejected it? Not at all! I simply left it there—

SARCOLI. With Pietro? For him to publish?

XXX. No! Quite the contrary! Forbidding him to publish it!

SARCOLI. Then he was the one to give the whole show away.

Just to go on with the jokel

SCELZI (*shouting*). That's not true! What are you saying? I was the one that forced his hand!

XXX. And he admitted to you?

SARCOLI. Of course! The jokel

SCELZI (*while the others repeat indignantly: "The jokel The jokel!" clenches his fist and exclaims indignantly to himself*).

Fool . . . fool . . . fool . . . (*Then bursting out loudly.*) Nol Pietro said nothing of a joke. Just the opposite. He stood up for you and your book. But I proved to him—

xxx (*aggressively*). What did you prove to him?

SCELZI (*angrily beating the back of his hand against the proofs*). —That these new pages had a false ring—

xxx. Ah, of course! They're false now, are they?

SCELZI. . . . No, I still didn't know! But even without knowing . . . the trick is quite obvious!

xxx. Yes! Of course!

SCELZI. I can show you the notes I had made all on my own. And you may remember that I never went all out for Delago, anyhow!

xxx. Yes! Yes! (*To himself.*) Yes, just as I said . . . a joke . . . it can't be anything else . . . a joke, of course . . . now that you know that I'm Delago.

SARCOLI. What else can it be?

FIRST ENTHUSIAST. He admits it himself!

xxx (*turning once more aggressively toward SCELZI*). You didn't go all out for Delago, then? And what about the new "mode," as you called it? The new "mode" you felt in him? "No, I'm not joking." And what about "burying the question," which means burying those of us who belong to an older generation? A joke, eh? Oh, yes, of course! Now that you know I'm Delago.

SCELZI. Exactly, now that you're Delago. And that's plain right here! (*Beating his hand again on the proofs.*) Paper work . . . a book . . . a manipulation of style! And let me tell you this—you take such a high and mighty tone with me—it doesn't fit in with the moral code of those of us who are of the younger generation . . .

xxx. No?

SCELZI. No, because to us a poet is no longer a bookish man of letters—

SARCOLI. Who can amuse himself by pretending to be young when he isn't!

FIRST ENTHUSIAST. Now that we know that you're Delago we've had enough!

SCELZI. Yes, quite enough. Because to us a poet must be first of all a *man*! Not just printed paper, but a real flesh and blood person.

xxx (*holding the book in his hands and shaking it while he proudly and indignantly turns to SCELZI*). And isn't there a man here? Isn't there flesh and blood? "Life with a different pulsation" . . . "new life," as you yourself said? No, more than that, isn't it true? Because of my age? Youth to you is a matter of years, not of spirit, is that it? Your "moral code" is simply insolvent presumptuousness! Can't I, I myself, be younger than any of you and feel in me that which in you is still unexpressed? Yes, feel it, I say, feel it so deeply that I express it before you do, and in a new manner different from anything I have done before? Is it this that is immoral and trespasses against your moral code? Well, in that case then, yes, I have tricked you!

(*Enter exultingly from the right MODONI, followed by two newspaper reporters, and at almost the same moment, from the left, the excited and surprised TITO, GIAFFREDI, GIOVANNA, and VALENTINA. It is up to the director to arrange the timing of the following dialogue. The young people on the one side and the family and friends on the other will turn to speak all at once to xxx, who stands in the middle. This natural confusion does not last for long. The main thing is that the essentials be heard clearly.*)

MODONI (*hurrying to embrace xxx*). Magnificent, my friend. A magnificent trick!

SCELZI. So we're tricked, are we?

MODONI. I was tricked myself.

TITO (*rushing into the room*). I realized it, Father! I said plagiaries only because I didn't know! (*To MODONI.*) I didn't know!

MODONI. Who could have imagined it?

SCELZI. I could, because I had already discovered it . . .

TITO. You? When? That they were plagiaries? I called them that because I didn't know!

GIAFFREDI (*who meanwhile has come in and patted xxx on the back*). This is a real and tremendous satisfaction!

MODONI. Of the kind that can only be his and his alone!

GIOVANNA. He's still the same! Still the same!

SARCOLI. But we're the ones who are really satisfied!

VALENTINA. I feel as if I were coming out of a nightmare!

TITO. Didn't I tell you? I called them plagiaries because I didn't know!

MODONI (*to the young people derisively*). Delago, the new poet!

VALENTINA. "Dedalus," eh Tito? I dreamed about it!

TITO. Yes, with Father's books, in America!

GIAFFREDI (*to the young people*). There you are, gentlemen!

SCELZI. Don't say that to us. We came here—

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*interrupting*). Please, gentlemen . . . Maestro, if you'll be so kind. The papers are going to press—

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. —in the expectation of your verifying—

MODONI. I brought them with me. This will create a tremendous stir! They want to give out the news right away, but they must have it straight from you . . .

xxx. From me? What news?

SARCOLI. That Delago was all a joke!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to xxx*). Do you say that's true?

xxx. I? Can't you hear *them*? They're shouting it to the skies.

MODONI. Tricked! Tricked!

YOUNG PEOPLE. No, not a bit of it!
 Not well
 The joke is on him!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to the second*). Let's get away! Let's get away!

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN (*to the young people*). We don't need to hear any more!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Modoni, don't forget the photographers!

(Exit the two newspapermen.)

SCELZI (*running after them with his companions*). No! You must say that I was the first one to uncover the deception—

SARCOLI. And that we came here to protest—

THE OTHERS. Yes, to protest, to protest!

(The disorderly exit of this group leaves the family and friends laughing.)

GIOVANNA. How happy I am! So happy!

MODONI (*to xxx*). This is your crowning glory!

GIAFFREDI. You're magnificent! Magnificent!

TITO. The way they fled!

VALENTINA. What a sight they made of themselves!

MODONI. We must set up a statue to that nephew of yours. He couldn't have done us a better turn!

GIOVANNA. He's done himself a good turn, too. That book will go like wildfire.

MODONI. Oh, no, it won't.

GIAFFREDI. We can have it seized. We can bring suit for abuse of confidence and sequestration.

MODONI. No! *Our* books will go like wildfire too, Your Excellency. I've already given word to restock all the bookshops!

TITO. With all the talk there's bound to be . . .

MODONI. Delago is done for, I tell you. They won't sell as

many as half a dozen copies, and *The Girl on the Balcony* will go down too. I know the public's whims. As soon as they hear it was all a joke . . .

XXX (*as if he were rousing himself from his meditation, to MODONI*). It's all your fault.

MODONI. Mine? What do you mean?

XXX. Yours, because you wouldn't publish the book.

GIAFFREDI (*astonished*). What's that? Aren't you glad?

GIOVANNA (*stunned*). This is incredible!

XXX (*impulsively, although trying to control himself*). Glad? Why should I be glad? That Delago is done for? (*He looks hard at them.*) And who was he? Who was he? Glad to have reduced to a joke that which was . . . which was a new voice, *all my own*, arousing everyone's eager attention . . . a *living* voice, a voice that was—that still is—*alive*, alive and *my very own!*

GIAFFREDI. But if no one knew, then . . .

GIOVANNA. —that it was yours! . . . It's beyond me!

GIAFFREDI. You were the only one to know!

MODONI. They had set it up against you!

XXX. That's what I wanted!

GIAFFREDI. Yes? That it should crowd you out of the limelight?

XXX. That it should crowd me out of the limelight!

GIAFFREDI. That he should be the new idol and you should be discarded?

XXX. Yes, because *he was alive!*

GIAFFREDI. I can't understand you any longer.

XXX. I know that you can't understand!

MODONI. Should I have published the book as yours?

XXX. Well, if it *was* mine . . .

GIAFFREDI. So that everyone would say you were imitating Delago?

XXX. Yes, exactly! That's just what I wanted!

GIAFFREDI. In order to sink into complete obscurity?

xxx. No! In order to add him to myself. To make what is mine really mine. Real life, not a joke. Real blood in my veins. That's what I was after.

MODONI. How? I don't see . . .

xxx. How? I knew how! Not by uncovering him too soon, but by publishing the book under my name so as to cause people to say that it was a second-rate Delago, the false and pitiful attempt of an old man to catch the new, fresh, genuine voice of a young one. Don't you see? I wanted Delago to be even more successful, so that his youth and originality would stand out all the more as supple, firm, and clear in contrast to my feeble copy. Then, when his reputation was certain, beyond a doubt, to uncover the fact—

TITO. That you were Delago?

xxx. And that however badly I might do it, I was not imitating anyone—or rather, I was imitating myself, since I was Delago!

MODONI. Just listen to that! Why didn't you tell us?

GIAFFREDI. Did you want to make the joke a bigger and better one?

xxx. The joke! Always the joke! You can't see anything but a joke. It's incredible to you that I should still feel alive and break out of this prison of myself, where I am closed in, walled in! And I suffocate, I tell you! I suffocate and die! Why didn't I tell you? This is why. If you had known that I was Delago—

GIOVANNA. Didn't your nephew know?

xxx. Of course he did.

GIAFFREDI. And that's why he published the book under the name of Delago?

xxx. Silly! He didn't understand, either. I didn't have time to warn him. But who could have imagined that you (*turning to MODONI*) would hand me back the manuscript and refuse to publish it! And now he has disobeyed me— But I know why he

did it. He wanted—they wanted—to liberate me. And they didn't understand, although I had hinted as much, that to reveal the identity of Delago prematurely would seem like a hoax.

GIOVANNA. You're as sorry as if, since Delago is done for, you had lost everything you had! Aren't you the same as you always were, plus the fact that you've played a colossal joke on those young fools who first believed in him and now have lost their belief?

xxx. Oh, I know that there's nothing left for me to do but to come out and say that I meant the whole thing as a joke.

GIAFFREDI. You can be very well satisfied with that! After all, it's a great proof of talent and vitality to create an idol and then to destroy it. It can only add to your reputation.

TITO. But it would have been more interesting if things had worked out the way he intended them to!

xxx. You're not even attempting to understand how deeply all this grieves me . . .

VALENTINA. Oh, yes! I knew all of Delago's lyrics by heart . . . the "Early Morning Child" . . .

TITO. And "The Walk"! . . . "The Walk"! . . .

xxx. All a joke! A joke!

GIOVANNA. As far as I'm concerned, that's what I prefer to believe. I can't begin to imagine how a man like you, and at your age, could seriously write them. I can only accept them as a joke, and even then I think they're unworthy of you. It's unbelievable that you should suffer over them. . . . But just look at the hollowness of his face. . . .

TITO. Do you feel unwell, Father?

xxx (*brusquely*). No, no! No more!

GIOVANNA. It's something that I . . .

GIAFFREDI (*whispering*). Easy there, Giovanna.

(*There is a painful silence.*)

VALENTINA. Too bad!

TITO. Yes, too bad!

VALENTINA.

“A round of thoughts, light and dark,
That is never broken
We can never cease
To have this round of things within us.
We can neither die
Nor can we be born.
In truth, we are here
As if we had always been born,
As if we had always been alive.”

(*Another painful silence.*)

MODONI (*timidly*). The photographers are still waiting. (*He points to the door on the right.*)

XXX (*brusquely*). No, for the love of heaven! That would really be the limit! Send them away!

MODONI. Be a little patient, my dear fellow . . .

GIAFFREDI. The reporters brought them along . . .

XXX. I can't listen to reason just now. Send them away!

MODONI. They're just waiting . . .

XXX. *You* brought them, and the reporters too!

TITO. And it's too late now, anyway.

MODONI. No, there's still time to catch the evening edition. The articles are already written.

XXX. In order to trumpet the news of the hoax?

MODONI. It's very necessary at a time like this, for your own sake . . . and for mine too.

XXX. I can't stand any more. Leave me in peace!

MODONI. Just for a second. You persuade him, Giaffredi.

XXX. No one's going to persuade me! I say to leave me in peace!

MODONI. But just think of the racket that's going to be made

by those young people who think you've tried to trick them. They'll launch an attack on all your work, and on your reputation.

GIOVANNA. They can't touch him!

MODONI. I know that. But we must beat them to it! Throw them into confusion! Cover them with ridicule! We must make the first move and take the offensive, while the cards are stacked in our favor!

TITO. Yes, we must take the offensive or else they'll attack us first.

GIAFFREDI. And just now, with what's in the offing . . .

GIOVANNA. Do you think it might hurt his chances?

GIAFFREDI. It would be better to quell any discussion . . .

MODONI. No, I don't say that. Don't misunderstand me. I don't say we have anything to fear. I say that we mustn't lose this chance. We must take advantage of it, that's all. In order to add, as you just said, to his reputation! (*To TITO.*) And you must point out to me those plagiaries.

TITO. Yes, five or more of them. I called them plagiaries because I didn't know!

MODONI. We'll throw those in their teeth! Idiots that they were, not to see! While he was playing such a very obvious game. Just let me take care of them. (*To xxx.*) Just give in for a minute, and put yourself in my hands.

xxx. All this revolts me! Don't you understand? It's doing me in!

GIOVANNA. But it ought to give you pleasure!

TITO. No, I understand . . .

VALENTINA. So do I . . .

MODONI. That's all right, because you're young. But just now leave everything to me. You explain to him, Your Excellency.

GIAFFREDI (*To xxx*). I understand that you may feel sad about it, but just think that it's the loss of just one moment of your existence, the last one—

xxx. The only one when I was *alive* . . .

GIAFFREDI. Don't make me laugh. You live in all your work.

xxx. I didn't say anything about my work. I mean "I, myself" . . . "alive"! . . .

GIAFFREDI. And doesn't your work live? Would you throw it all away for the sake of this one moment?

MODONI. Let it be attacked by those mad dogs who will do all they can to break it down and destroy it for the sake of their own revenge?

xxx. If it can't stand on its merits; if it comes apart and can be broken down . . .

GIAFFREDI. Of course not! But their attack will be unjust and vengeful; our tactics must be to nip it in the bud. To take advantage of this—well, you didn't really mean it as a joke, but you see yourself that you'd best treat it as such, and use it as a weapon!

MODONI. Yes! Exactly! That's why I've already lined up the responsible papers on your side!

GIAFFREDI. For thirty years now, you've worked to establish a figure of yourself in public opinion; you've painfully sculptured it. . . . Surely now you can't wish for it to be destroyed!

xxx. Yes, destroyed. . . . If I must be only a figure—

MODONI. Would you deny yourself?

xxx. What should it matter to me?

GIAFFREDI. What, it doesn't matter?

GIOVANNA. Whose life are you talking about, anyhow?

TITO (*simultaneously*). You're *our* life, Father!

VALENTINA (*simultaneously*). We live on you. Our lives exist by virtue of yours.

xxx (*overcome*). Very well, then; very well. On with the photographers and reporters, then—

MODONI (*running triumphantly to the door on the right to call the photographers*). Right away, then! Right away!

xxx (*exhaustedly*). —and the hoax, and the best tactics, and

the sculptured figure of myself . . . (*Throwing up his arms.*)
Here it is! Call them in! But let them be quick about it!

GIOVANNA (*half to herself*). I'd like to know what other sort of life he'd like . . .

xxx. No other life, my dear, no other. Only this one, which is yours . . .

GIOVANNA. And yours too!

xxx. . . . Yes, sculptured. (*To GIAFFREDI.*) How well you put it! Look, how's this? Do I look right?

(*Three photographers, summoned by MODONI, have come in, two with tripods, one with a small camera and a flash bulb.*)

MODONI. First, one of him alone. Let's all stand aside.

FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER. Standing up? Wouldn't it be better—

MODONI. No, the first one standing up. Then the next at his desk. Be patient, my dear fellow. There are so many papers! The third between His Excellency and me.

GIAFFREDI. No, never mind me. I can spare him that.

MODONI. No, let me have it my way. I know what I'm doing! (*To xxx.*) Won't you give this satisfaction and honor to your faithful publisher? Then the fourth can be the family.

GIOVANNA. It will be full of smoke in here before they get to us!

xxx (*With the photographers training their lenses upon him and making ready to set off the flash bulb, makes a distracted gesture*). Then, my dear, we shall be among the thunder and lightning of Olympus!

PHOTOGRAPHERS. Good Lord! He moved!
What a shame!

He raised his arm just as we clicked!

xxx. You're right. Excuse me.

MODONI. I'm sorry, my dear fellow. Put yourself back in position. You moved just at the wrong time . . .

xxx. Quite right! I must never move again.

GIOVANNA. It won't do with all this smokel

FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER. Isn't there a socket on the wall?

TITO. Yes, here near the door.

FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER. Capitall I have an electric bulb that will do the job. And we shan't make any more smoke. Go get it, will you?

(*The SECOND PHOTOGRAPHER goes to get the electric bulb, and as the scene goes on he and his companions screw it in.*)

xxx. Take just one, will you? There are so many old ones you can use.

GIAFFREDI. Yes, one's enough, Modoni.

GIOVANNA. He's too tired. You must let him off. Just one. (*In a low voice, to GIAFFREDI.*) Perhaps even that's not a good idea . . . Just look at him—he seems like a corpse . . .

GIAFFREDI (*quietly, to GIOVANNA*). Yes, I'm really worried.

(*Enter CESARE.*)

CESARE. May I come in? The clerk from the gramophone company is here again.

xxx. Good! He too . . .

MODONI (*annoyed*). What does he want?

xxx. Never mind. Let him in. One more or one less . . .

CLERK (*coming in again with his portable machine*). Excuse me, Maestro, perhaps I'm bothering you—

xxx. No, the door is open to all. Come on in. Anyone is welcome!

CLERK. The company sent me. . . . We should like to take advantage of this great occasion to come out with the new record—

xxx. Yes, of course. Do take advantage of it. No one must miss the chancel

CLERK. I have a photographer with me, but I see there are three of them here already. I wanted to take you with your family and friends, listening to—

xxx. No. Look here! (*He goes resolutely to sit down in the chair behind his desk.*) Like this. I'll sit down at the desk. Have you the gramophone with you?

CLERK. Yes, I brought it along.

MODONI. What do you want to do?

xxx. Leave it to me! (*To the photographers.*) There, you see. Good fellows, with that blinding bulb of yours! Ready now? (*To MODONI.*) A writer has to be snapped at his desk, you know. That's bound to come out well. Here, in my usual pose. Just a second. (*Without stirring from his pose, to TITO.*) Tito, get the gramophone.

TITO (*taking it from the CLERK*). Here, Father. (*Drawing nearer.*) Where shall I put it?

xxx. Behind me.

TITO. How do you mean, behind you?

xxx (*still motionless*). Split my back open.

TITO. What are you saying, Father?

xxx. Split my back open and put the gramophone in my belly. Then I'll talk and you can all stand around and listen.

MODONI. That's a good one!

GIOVANNA. He's only joking.

(*They try to laugh, but unsuccessfully.*)

TITO. Here I was, listening to hear what he wanted . . .

PHOTOGRAPHERS. Still now! Still!

All ready!

There we are!

xxx (*getting up*). At last! That's enough now.

GIOVANNA. Yes, quite enough. You mustn't tire him any more. Let's leave him.

TITO (*to the CLERK*). I'm sorry, but you can see for yourself it's really out of the question . . .

CLERK. What a pity, the company might have. . . . But never mind . . . Perhaps some other time . . .

MODONI (*to the photographers*) Come along, now. We must get those developed and send them around to all the papers.

FIRST PHOTOGRAPHER. Wait a second. I'm taking the bulb out of the socket.

MODONI (*to the family*). I'll be back later.

(*Exit MODONI with the photographers and the CLERK.*)

GIAFFREDI. I'm going now too.

GIOVANNA. No, wait just a minute. I'd like to tell you . . .

(*Enter CESARE.*)

CESARE. May I come in? Your nephew, sir, with the two ladies.

GIOVANNA (*abruptly*). No. That's too much. We've had enough of them in this house. You mustn't see them.

XXX (*firm and controlled*). I shall see them. You can go out . . .

GIOVANNA. Are you sending us away for their benefit?

XXX. I mean if you don't want to see them. (*To CESARE.*) Have them come in.

GIOVANNA. But you really shouldn't!

TITO. It's his nephew, Mother . . .

VALENTINA. I can't stand them, myself.

GIAFFREDI. Calm! Calm!

GIOVANNA. He ought to understand that I say it for his own sake. . . . In the condition he's in—Come, this way . . .

(*Exit GIOVANNA, VALENTINA, TITO and GIAFFREDI to the left.*)

XXX (*To CESARE*). Let them in.

(*xxx stands in front of his desk, with his hands behind him, leaning upon it, as if he were waiting for a last blow to finish him off. There is no more life in him, but only before his eyes; he already knows and understands what NATASCIA, PIETRO and—above all—VEROCCIA have come to say. He accepts it as right and just but can make no reply; he stands there in mute an-*

guish while the others talk excitedly in front of him. In order to achieve this effect, the scene must take place as if they were saying just what he expected them to say and moving as he thinks they should: that is, PIETRO explains; VEROCCIA scolds and scorns him, weeps and despairs; NATASCIA calmly expresses their common sorrow, and all this is clear and comprehensible to xxx, but at the same time utterly remote from him.)

VEROCCIA (*going up to him with an open newspaper in her hand*). Did you really say—publicly—that it was all a trick and a hoax? (*She looks at him as he stands there motionless, and then, as if he had shaken his head, she goes on.*) No, you say? Do you say no? But it's printed right here. (*She shows him the paper.*) But you didn't do it, eh? The others did it; they shouted and ordered and printed it all. But you didn't do it! You only said it to me, like a threat or a fear that through some fault of ours has actually come to pass, isn't that it? And that's all. Now you have nothing more to say. (*She turns to the others in exasperation.*) He's looking at me, that's all. But he says nothing! (*To xxx.*) Can't you do anything but look at me? Oh, but I know! (*To the others.*) He can't do anything else! He's surrendered; he's accepted their decree!

PIETRO. I came to tell you . . .

NATASCIA. Quiet, Pietro, he knows. Can't you see that he knows? And he may even add that he stuck up for us.

VEROCCIA. Stuck up for us on what score?

PIETRO. For having tried to bring him alive?

VEROCCIA. That's just what seems to him to be our fault, can't you see?

NATASCIA. No, not to him!

VEROCCIA. Yes, to him. To him too, if he has surrendered!

NATASCIA. Don't let's be unjust, Verocchia. The others found it a fault, not he. (*Turning to xxx.*) And you stuck up for us, didn't you? Although perhaps no one here spoke so badly of

us—that is, if it's true as it says in the paper that we (*Turning to PIETRO.*)—that is, you, really did them a good turn.

PIETRO. I did them a good turn? Oh, no! I wanted to do *him* a good turn by letting Delago take the book which they had not allowed to be published as his. And perhaps they were right there, too, because the book is really Delago's!

VEROCCIA. Yes, for a joke!

PIETRO. Because he didn't know how to use it against that band of idiots whom I had driven away with stones like so many barking dogs!

NATASCIA. Perhaps he did the same thing, even if he doesn't say so at the moment.

VEROCCIA. And why doesn't he say so? Why doesn't he?

NATASCIA. Because it hurts him. He ought to scold us and he doesn't want to. This book was for you, Veroccia, but he had so many others that were equally his to defend. And here the lot of them—old and young—proclaimed it all a joke. . . .

VEROCCIA. And so you say it was a joke. I was just a joke. That's what I served you for. And you were only joking with me, joking, is that it? The young people who were deserting you . . . The old friends who were deserting you . . . But what did you need to care if I was still there, if you still had me? I wasn't deserting you. I gave myself to you without reservations, and you know it, only you were a coward and didn't want it that way . . . You know perfectly well that I gave myself to you without reservations and you didn't have the courage to take me, to take the life I wanted to give you, because you suffered from not having any life and not even being able to hope to have one. You received that gift of life from me and then you let them call it all a joke. Coward! Coward! Coward! (*VEROCCIA breaks into convulsive tears of mingled scorn and sorrow.*)

NATASCIA (*after letting her cry for a moment*). There, there, my dear. Don't cry any longer. . . . I care so much for you, my

dear, that I shouldn't need to dance like Salome: I could walk quietly in there and bring you that old wife's head on a platter. But it would be no use, don't you see? He's there motionless, rooted to the ground.

VEROCCIA (*leaping to her feet*). Yes! That's the fate he's condemned to. To stay there, lifeless. Let us leave him. Let us go away. Away!

(*Exit VEROCCIA, dragging the others behind her, without even looking around. Now that xxx is left alone, he can at last speak. And he talks with infinite tenderness to VEROCCIA, as if she were still present.*)

xxx. I know! Because you saw me alive and wanted me to be alive along with you . . . You were ready for anything. . . . And now you reproach me for the harm I did you. But I shouldn't have harmed you because I wasn't alive like you, you who were the embodiment of my youthful spirit. There was no youth left in my body, for that was already old. . . . You didn't realize that I was holding back because I was ashamed of my age compared to your youth. You don't know what an atrocious thing happens to an old man, to see himself all of a sudden in a mirror, when the sorrow of seeing himself is greater than the astonishment of no longer remembering. You don't know the almost obscene shame of feeling a young and hot-blooded heart within an old body. Yes, you are still alive and young, my little one, so alive that you've already changed. . . . You can still change from one moment to the next, and I can never do that again. You didn't stop to think that I couldn't change; you wanted me to be still alive. . . . My dear, you took my last living moment. Just think of that! How would you have ever consoled yourself for having nothing else? Just by saying that it was not the last moment of an ordinary old man, but of *somebody*, somebody important at every single moment of his long life, the life which had made him into *some-*

body, somebody who can no longer live, my dear, except to suffer. (He pauses and then adds with gloomy solemnity:) When somebody is alive, no one sees him. (Pause.) You saw me because to you I was not somebody important, but a man whom you wanted to see alive, detached from his self in a moment of time that belonged to you. And I myself, as I was, I the important somebody, what was I to you? A puppet, such as I was when you cut my hair. As a matter of fact, you never even saw me as somebody; you couldn't bear to see me that way and asked me irritably: "Why do you suffer?" Now you know why I suffer and you don't care to know it. You have seen me as somebody, and for you I am no longer alive. (It has gradually grown dark. Suddenly the last ray of daylight is gone, and before he can turn on the lamp on his desk, which will make a spectral light like that at the beginning of the act, the four poets come out on the platform as they did before, but this time as austere stiff as statues. xxx moves slowly back into the position of leaning against his desk and murmurs in the darkness.) When one is *somebody*, then at the opportune moment (*turning on the light*), one must decree one's own death and remain locked up, mounting guard over one's self.

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

A large garden of the country house, where xxx has spent the almost ended summer. On either side are pine and cypress trees, with oleander and laurel bushes. In the middle in an open space in front of the house, which is seen in the background, is a low, raised marble platform with three seats, the center one of an ancient Roman curule type, the two others curving around to form a semicircle with low box-trees behind them. The house in the background is white; it has a wide glass door and two arched windows on either side, all of them lit up and giving the impression that the main downstairs room is a long, rectangular hall. Between these ground-floor windows and those of the second floor there is a space of at least a yard, providing room enough for an inscription which at a certain point appears to come out letter by letter. Of course the inscription will have been there all the time, hidden by sheets of paper of the same color as the façade, which will be pulled away, revealing the words as xxx pronounces them. The façade is made of pieces of canvas that can be fitted together with a narrowing effect and also be lowered from the top when the time comes to pull the whole façade back on wheels to the extreme rear of the stage. At the same time, after xxx has sat down in the curule seat, his statue will be raised about four feet into the air on a combination platform and pedestal covered with white cloth and coming up from below the stage.

When the curtain goes up it is twilight. It grows gradually darker and darker until, by the end of the act, night has come and there is a glow of white moonlight. In front of the illu-

minated entrance of the house there is a group of guests and the two newspapermen whom we saw in the first act. Apparently they could find no place in the hall (or, in the case of the newspapermen, they preferred to stay outside for professional reasons) and they are intently watching what goes on there. There is a confused sound of Cabinet Minister GIACAFREDI'S speech to celebrate the poet's fiftieth birthday and the bestowal of the title of Count upon him. Every now and then the voice is interrupted by a burst of applause. At the front of the stage are TITO, CESARE, and two HIRED WAITERS.

TITO (*hurriedly*). His arrival has been reported as imminent, but he won't come in this way. Everything is ready. You must listen for a blast from the horn of his car as it stops at the gate and hurry to meet him—

CESARE (*chiming in*). Two on one side and two on the other, along with the gateman, and we'll all bow. We've found a mace for the gateman.

TITO. Good. (*He starts to go into the house and then adds:*) It's not "Your Excellency" any more, but "His Excellency the Count."

CESARE. Have no fear, sir. The Countess has already told us.

TITO. Ah, good.

(The two newspapermen go up to TITO as he starts toward the house. From inside comes applause.)

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Please, if you'd be so kind . . .

TITO. Didn't you find places? Just come along with me.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. No, we stayed outside on purpose—

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. In order to get material for a story from one of the family. If you could tell us something . . .

TITO. But I can't, don't you see? I have to give instructions—the Prince's arrival is imminent. It seemed for a while as if he couldn't come, and instead—

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Splendid. That way the celebration will include the greatest possible honors.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Too bad that the Minister has already begun his speech . . .

TITO. It's wonderful, simply wonderful! Have you heard any of it?

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. It's been set up in the office ever since this morning. A bit argumentative, perhaps . . .

TITO. But that's his manner.

(*Applause.*)

Do you hear the enthusiasm? And what a select audience.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Yes, we saw. An assembly of king—

TITO. Excuse me, I must go along—

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. We're sorry . . .

(*Enter, from the house, VALENTINA, with a bunch of flowers.*)

VALENTINA. Tito, I don't know how to hand this bouquet to His Highness now that he's coming in the private door.

TITO. Ask Mother, for heaven's sake. How should I know? You can hand it to him after he gets in.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to VALENTINA*). If you could do us the favor—

TITO. Oh, no. In that case I'll stay myself. What is it you want to know?

VALENTINA. Do you want the list of guests?

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. We have that.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Some other fellows from our office are covering the celebration itself.

TITO. Then if you don't mind, at a moment like this . . .

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to VALENTINA*). Some intimate details of your father's family life . . .

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. That would have enormous news value. So little is known about him.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. He must be happy, of course, over all these honors.

TITO. Happy? It took all Mother's powers of persuasion and the authority of Giaffredi to get him to accept them. He made us sweat over him, and we are still in a state of anxiety—

VALENTINA. Still, knowing him well, I think it's safe to say that once he's given in, he actually enjoys them. Quite a lot, in fact.

TITO. Just to show you what he's really like!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Stubborn and rebellious, of course, we know that.

TITO. Mother is the one that is really above praise. It's to her credit if his reputation is as solid as a block of marble. We children know that very well.

VALENTINA. Yes, Mother has done so much. . . . He's like a big baby where practical things are concerned, incapable of buying himself so much as a handkerchief. His great taste is for observation.

TITO. Oh, yes! You can be sure that this very minute he is busy observing. All the while he has a distracted air and seems to see nothing. I don't know how he does it! Mother is angry sometimes: What? Didn't you see this? Didn't you see that? Ah, no! He hasn't seen, but he alone has noted things that make us goggle when he tells us about them. Do you remember the way he observed how that woman twisted her fingers? He imitated her for us, and in his simple gesture she came to life before us and left us gaping.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*taking notes*). This is all very interesting.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Extremely!

TITO (*to CESARE*). Cesare, my boy, don't hang about. You might send those two waiters to the entrance, so that they'll be ready . . .

CESARE. Yes, sir. Right away, sir.

(The two hired waiters walk around the house to the right.)

TITO *(to the newspapermen)*. I must go now myself. I can't stay any longer. Come along with me, Valentina, and we'll see what you're to do about the flowers.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN *(going up with his companion to CESARE)*. Now you tell us something.

CESARE. What can I tell you?

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Come on, there's a good fellow. No man is a hero to his valet. Have you looked after him for many years?

CESARE. Eighteen. But I have nothing to say.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Tell us at least whether you dress him.

CESARE. The Count has always dressed himself.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. That's useful to know. And you've never surprised and caught him unaware some morning when you've taken him his coffee?

CESARE. The Count is so dignified and reserved that when I knock at the door and come in, I find him with his hair already combed.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Very interesting!

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. So he doesn't sleep with anything on his head to keep the wave in his hair?

CESARE. Nothing at all. His hair is naturally curly. Now I must beg you not to ask me any more questions. I can't answer them.

(The two newspapermen, having taken their notes, are moving back toward the entrance to the house, when enter from the left VEROCCIA and a policeman who is trying to block her way.)

POLICEMAN. No, I say you can't come in without an invitation.

VEROCCIA. I told you I didn't want to go in!

POLICEMAN. How can you say you don't want to go in when you're trying your best to do it?

(*He is about to take her by the arm. CESARE and the two newspapermen come nearer.*)

VEROCCIA (*drawing away*). Keep off!

CESARE (*to the policeman*). The lady is a relative—

VEROCCIA. I'm not a relative!

CESARE. Yes, the Count . . .

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. His nephew's sister-in-law.

CESARE. An American—

VEROCCIA. I'm not American.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. She's Russian.

POLICEMAN. Oh, Russian, is she? Then let's see your papers.

VEROCCIA (*pointing to her handbag*). They're in here. My passport's been stamped for embarkation.

CESARE (*sotto voce to VEROCCIA*). It's the local police commissioner, in person.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. We can guarantee having met the lady before. She's really his nephew's sister-in-law.

CESARE. Yes, the Count's—

POLICEMAN. Then why hasn't she an invitation?

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. For that very reason!

POLICEMAN (*to VEROCCIA*). I'm to keep off, am I? I have orders to keep other people off, I tell you.

VEROCCIA. I'm happy to see that a police commissioner has orders to keep someone like me away from him.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. It's on account of the titled visitor who's due to arrive—

POLICEMAN. What do you mean by "someone like me"?

VEROCCIA. Someone who's to be kept away from him, like every other live thing. I know that well enough, never fear. And I have no wish to approach him. (*To CESARE.*) I told him that I didn't want to go in.

POLICEMAN. What do you want, then?

VEROCCIA. Nothing. Only to see—

CESARE (*filling out her sentence*). Ah, if your sister and brother-in-law are inside?

VEROCCIA. No, I don't think they've arrived yet. And they don't know I'm here. I only wanted to see him from a distance, without his knowing it, before I go. But now I don't even want to do that any longer. I see that there are so many . . . (*She points to the group standing around the door.*)

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to CESARE*). If she wants to see, you could get them to step aside.

CESARE. Of course. I'm sure that her aunt, the Countess, would say just that.

VEROCCIA. She's not my aunt.

CESARE (*to the policeman*). Go along, Commissioner, if you're supposed to be inside.

POLICEMAN. Will you make yourself responsible for this woman?

CESARE. Yes, I will.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. So will we, Commissioner.

POLICEMAN. Very well. (*He goes out the same way he came.*)

(*More applause from within.*)

VEROCCIA. Are they making a funeral oration?

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*laughing*). Very good! That's it.

CESARE (*with dignity*). Funeral? No. Why? The Minister is speaking.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. For the bestowal of the title of Count upon him.

CESARE. It's a very solemn festivity.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. His Highness the Prince is expected.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. If you could see the distinguished audience!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to CESARE*). Just get those people to step aside . . .

(CESARE goes to do so.)

VEROCCIA (*making a preventive gesture*). No . . .

(*She remains perplexed, torn between the desire to see XXX and the urge to go away. The guests at the door, whom CESARE has asked to step aside, come forward. Some of them sit on the two side seats in the center, while VEROCCIA cautiously goes to look through the door.*)

FIRST GUEST. Yes, gladly . . .

SECOND GUEST. There's no end to it!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to VEROCCIA*). Now you can step right up . . .

THIRD GUEST. Lucky we stayed outside. With the heat there is in there! . . . He speaks well, but it's all so long!

FOURTH GUEST. Here at least we can breathe. Let's have a smoke. (*He offers the THIRD GUEST a cigarette.*)

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*to the SECOND*). We didn't think to ask the son and daughter what was the family reaction to the discovery of the old man's last adventure. . . . Do you see how she's looking at him?

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Is that story really true?

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Can't you see with your own eyes? How she's shut out of the celebration, practically put out the door . . . And didn't you notice how he looks there inside?

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Yes, he looks like a dead man. . . . There's a regular legend about this affair, how it took place at his nephew's, and with the approval of her sister. . . . She must be barely twenty-one. . . .

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Well, these Russians, you know . . .

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. And how the wife went and caught them . . .

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. No, I don't go so far as to believe that. . . . Never mind about the wife. . . . This girl is the one that interests me. (*Pointing to VEROCCIA.*) What a chapter for his biographer! And what a piece of background to see her there at the door, kept out of it all. . . .

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Too bad there isn't more light.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Look at her! Look at her! She's clenching her fists with her arms crossed over her chest. . . .

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. It looks as if she wanted to shout something.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. If we could speak to her again . . .

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Let's go nearer.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. No, if you go up to her now she'll run off.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. They're going away tomorrow.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Just think, those lyrics of Delago were all written for her, and whatever people say, they were beauties. . . .

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. And it all came to an end like that. . . .

(*The THIRD and FOURTH GUESTS, who have also been watching VEROCCIA, walk up to the newspapermen.*)

THIRD GUEST (*pointing at VEROCCIA*). Excuse me, but who's that girl? Do you know?

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Ah, well . . .

FOURTH GUEST. An admirer?

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Perhaps something more.

THIRD GUEST. She looks like a foreigner.

FOURTH GUEST. What do you mean by "something more"?

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Just look at her!

THIRD GUEST. Good Lord, she's shouting! What's that—she's covering her eyes.

(*VEROCCIA comes forward, trembling all over.*)

VEROCCLIA. He's dead! Dead!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*greatly upset*). Come now, what are you saying?

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Dead? Is it possible?

(*He and the others start toward the door, but they are stopped by a burst of applause at the end of GIAFFREDI'S speech.*)

THIRD GUEST. No, it can't be; they're applauding. . . .

FOURTH GUEST. The speech must be over. . . .

VEROCCLIA. He's dead, I tell you. Only no one knows it. I saw it in the way he closed his eyes.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. He's certainly done in . . .

THIRD GUEST. And dressed all in white like that . . .

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. That's something he's a little vain about. . . . Every summer . . . He's like a swan.

FOURTH GUEST. That may be. But with that deathly white face . . . The young lady is right. It gives a weird impression.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Just like a swan . . .

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. . . . One that's already sung his last song. He must really be ill.

THIRD GUEST. With all this excitement . . .

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*in a slightly malicious and mournful manner, turning to VEROCCLIA*). Perhaps it's not just the celebration . . .

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. When one's somebody—

VEROCCLIA. It means death.

(*An automobile horn sounds behind the house.*)

ALL (*except VEROCCLIA, running to the door*). Ah, here's the Prince! The Prince!

(*There is a new outburst of applause inside to greet the Prince's entrance. Enter from the left side of the house PIETRO and NATASCIA.*)

PIETRO (*going up gloomily to VEROCCIA*). Oh, here you are! We've been looking for you everywhere.

NATASCIA. I told you before . . . He knew that we were coming . . .

PIETRO. I'd have wagered my last penny that you wouldn't be here!

NATASCIA. You see, I know her better than you do. . . .

PIETRO. Well—have you seen him?

VEROCCIA (*nodding and barely opening her lips*). Yes.

PIETRO. And did he see you?

NATASCIA. What do you mean? Surely she didn't let him see her.

(Fresh applause from the house.)

VEROCCIA. He's far away. He can't hear anything or see anybody.

PIETRO. Natascia and I just want to speak to him and go away.

VEROCCIA. He won't see or hear you. In any case, don't say anything about me. I strictly forbid you. Don't tell him I was here. . . .

PIETRO. And what if he asks?

VEROCCIA. He won't ask.

(VEROCCIA starts to go out the same way she came in, but she is blocked by the breathless entry of the MOTHER SUPERIOR and two NUNS, followed by four BOYS and four GIRLS in uniform who represent their school at the celebration.)

MOTHER SUPERIOR (*breathlessly*). Come along; I told you we'd be late. . . . *(To the children)*. Wait here in the garden, all of you. Quietly, remember. *(To the nuns)*. And we'll go in.

(The MOTHER SUPERIOR and the two nuns make their way through the guests standing around the door and go in. The children, excited by their race to arrive on time, now that they are left unwatched, run all around the garden.)

FIRST BOY (*clasping his hands*). Nice place here!

SECOND BOY. It's going to be ours, including the gateman with the mace!

THIRD BOY. Here's where we'll have our gymnastics!

FOURTH BOY. No, over here. This will be a playing field. And we'll blow our horns.

FIRST GIRL. Why does the gateman have a mace?

OLDEST GIRL. Stop running, all of you, and stand still. To knock you over the head with, of course!

SECOND GIRL (*running to sit on one of the side seats, where the boys follow her*). Here's a good place to sit. But not all at once! There's room on the other side.

FIRST BOY (*catching hold of the SECOND, who has already sat down*). You go over there. It's exactly the same!

SECOND BOY (*wriggling loose*). No, this place is mine. You go.

(*They start fighting together.*)

OLDEST GIRL. Go away, all of you, if you're going to fight. Go on! I'll tell the Mother Superior!

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN (*seeing xxx coming out of the house*). Sh! Here he is! He's coming!

(*The children, the newspapermen, and the other guests are all frozen in their positions, however awkward, and stare at xxx admiringly. PIETRO and NATASCIA are motionless too, stricken by his appearance. VEROCCIA has gone.*)

xxx (*coming to a halt amid the general silence and gazing at the stillness, first of the children, then of the adult guests, and finally at that of PIETRO, before he speaks in a frozen voice*). You are the same way . . . All of you . . . (*Turning to PIETRO.*) You too . . .

PIETRO. Because I see you . . .

NATASCIA (*going closer to him and talking in a low but in-*

tense manner). Move, why don't you? Move! Pat these children on the head. Roll on the grass with them!

PIETRO. Leave it all behind you. You need only do something quite mad here in the public view!

NATASCIA. Quite cold-bloodedly!

PIETRO. And then go away with us. We'd come to get you first thing in the morning.

xxx (*distinctly, after a pause*). I can't do it.

NATASCIA. Are you afraid?

xxx. Afraid of what?

NATASCIA. Of finishing.

xxx. That's not fear. It's necessity.

NATASCIA. Is it on account of the others? Because you're sorry for them? In that case, what of Veroccia?

xxx. No, a necessity of my own. There's no pity involved. It's that I'm mortally tired of everything. I'm weighed down.

(TITO comes anxiously out of the house.)

TITO. Good Lord, Father—(*Seeing PIETRO and NATASCIA.*) Are you here?

PIETRO. We're on our way . . .

TITO (*to his father*). His Highness has just finished talking to Giaffredi, and in a few minutes he'll be going—

xxx (*pointing to PIETRO and NATASCIA*). I've just said good-by to them.

TITO. You could have done that later. Now you must hurry back in.

(xxx starts to go in. At the door he turns around and barely raises one arm to wave to PIETRO and NATASCIA. His wave seems to include someone else who is not there, and NATASCIA understands.)

NATASCIA. Yes, I'll tell her.

TITO. It's a very poor idea, my friends, to stand staring at him that way. As his son I know what I'm talking about.

NATASCIA. You, as his son, of course . . . And I suppose his valet moves easily about him too.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Of course. It's always other people around . . . their request and admiration . . .

NATASCIA. All of them things that kill. And people stop to stare at every object that once belonged to someone killed in this fashion. Including you, his son, when they recognize you. When a life comes to a stop or is stopped by someone—

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. The results of fame. That's what holds a man down.

NATASCIA. So that he's alive no longer.

TITO (*extremely irritated*). Who ever said such a thing? Who ever said it?

THIRD GUEST. He seems very much alive to me, I must say.

FIRST GUEST. Yes, thank God.

SECOND GUEST. Honored and admired by all.

FOURTH GUEST. Worshipped by his family and by the country at large.

FIRST GUEST. So great that nobody else can touch him.

THIRD GUEST. What more can a man desire?

FOURTH GUEST. Excuse me, but is this place his?

TITO. No, it belonged to his great friend—

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. Yes, the Princess, who died not so long ago.

TITO. How happy she would have been, with all the affection she had for him, if she could have seen all these honors. . . . But she left the place to a school.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Oh, does that explain the presence of all these children?

TITO. Yes, but under the condition that the school be named for Father.

SECOND NEWSPAPERMAN. They say the village where he was born has requested—

TITO. Yes, it's already been authorized to take on Father's name.

THIRD NEWSPAPERMAN. Here he comes back with the rest of them.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Yes, the Prince must have gone.

(Enter XXX with GIAFFREDI, the MOTHER SUPERIOR, GIOVANNA, VALENTINA, and a large group of guests who have remained after the Prince's departure, which marked the end of the celebration. In the garden, daylight is fast fading. Every now and then during the following scene we see the flashes of a photographer's camera.)

GIAFFREDI. He couldn't possibly have been more agreeable.

GIOVANNA. Too bad we couldn't tell him exactly how many inhabitants!

TITO. In Father's village? Did he ask that? I knew.

FIRST NEWSPAPERMAN. Twenty-five thousand.

TITO. Almost, but not quite. Twenty-four thousand, seven hundred and fifty-three.

GIOVANNA *(irritatedly to VALENTINA)*. Imagine that! He was the only one to know it and he was out here all the time. We told him that it used to be about eighteen thousand.

VALENTINA. But that doubtless it had increased since.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. He asked me how many pupils there were in the school. And I was happy to tell him that the school as well as the village was proud to be taking on such a glorious name. Sister, call the children so that we can introduce them to the Count. We brought just a few of them, so as not to disturb him.

(The two nuns, with some difficulty, collect the children from among the crowd.)

TITO. Father saw them a short while ago.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. I've already told them whom they were going to see.

GIOVANNA. Reverend Mother, you'll be able to take possession of the house within two or three days at the most.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. At your convenience. . . .

VALENTINA. We stayed on so late only on account of the celebration—

GIOVANNA. But now we're quite ready to move out.

MOTHER SUPERIOR. But the Princess left instructions that the Count should stay as long as he liked. And we have many changes to make . . . Ah, here are the children now! (*The nuns stand them in two rows in front of xxx.*) Well, what did I tell you? A nice bow.

(*While the children bow, there is a flare of magnesium from a photographer's light, which causes them to jump.*)

VALENTINA. Poor little things. They were scared. . . .

GIOVANNA. Have you both boys and girls?

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Yes, Countess. Two divisions.

GIAFFREDI (*to xxx*). You really ought to say something to them.

GIOVANNA. It would be very gracious on your part. . . .

MOTHER SUPERIOR. How much we should appreciate it! I didn't dare ask. . . .

GIOVANNA. If you're not too tired . . .

GIAFFREDI. Just a few words . . .

MOTHER SUPERIOR. Which will remain indelibly sculptured in our memory . . .

GIOVANNA. Try, my dear—just a word or two . . .

TITO. Silence! Silence!

(*There is a deep silence.*)

NATASCIA (*breaking the silence in a tone of deep regret, as if she cannot believe what she has seen and heard*). Just for this . . . to linger on for this . . .

GIOVANNA. What's that she's saying?

TITO. Silence!

(xxx is in front of the central seat on the marble platform. Everyone listens and the newspapermen prepare to take note of what he says. There are more flares from the lights of the photographers. Then complete stillness. xxx begins to speak in a clear, cold voice, pausing as if to gather strength to sculpture his words, which appear as an epigraph on the façade of the house behind him as he utters them.)

xxx. YOUTH

A RECOLLECTION ENVELOPED IN MYSTERY
WHICH WE APPROACH AS SHADOWS
AND AS SHADOWS LEAVE BEHIND US

(No one is aware of the appearance of the words on the wall. The silence must remain unbroken. All those present make gestures of admiration. GIOVANNA and VALENTINA lean over the children to ask them into the house along with the other guests, while TITO indicates that his father should be left alone in the garden. PIETRO and NATASCIA go out to the left of the house. When everyone has gone, xxx sits down on the central stone seat and then, in the moonlight, we see the house recede in the distance while the seat is slowly raised up with xxx in his customary rigid position, now the statue of himself. All this in a silence which seems to belong to the centuries.)

CURTAIN

