

The Shy Courtier:
A Translation of Tirso de Molina's
El vergonzoso en palacio

by

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Video Recording

In the interest of illustrating my description of the play's production, I have included with this volume a video recording of the performance of *The Shy Courtier* that took place on February 20, 2009. The cast members in the production were as follows:

The Duke	Anthony Hinds
Don Duarte	Julian Silver
Figueredo	Geri Rosenberg
Hunters	Dominic Ireland
	Daniel O'Sullivan
Tarso	Ameen Beydoun
Melisa	Ari Finard
Mireno	Gus Spelman
Ruy Lorenzo	Michael Inkles
Vasco	Jisan Zaman
Doristo	Pennan Chinnasamy
Lariso	Daniel O'Sullivan
Denio	Dominic Ireland
Doña Juana	Lila Becker
Don Antonio	Kenny Feder
Doña Madalena	Grace Petersen
Doña Serafina	Elissa Heller
Painter	Dominic Ireland
Lauro	Daniel O'Sullivan

Video recording by Franni Paley.

Introduction

Translation

About a year ago, when I decided to translate and produce Tirso de Molina's *El vergonzoso en palacio*, I had no idea what I was getting into. My translation experience was limited to a few poems in high school, and my directing experience consisted of exactly one one-act play. I had read one play by Tirso's contemporary, Lope de Vega. What I did know was that the project would bring together several of my academic interests: history, theater, the Spanish language, and the mechanics of language in general. Moreover, the prospect of immersing myself in the Spanish Golden Age, the age of Cervantes, Quevedo, Góngora, Velázquez and El Greco, was irresistible. The end result was better than I could have imagined, but the learning process I engaged in along the way was worth even more. This process involved finding solutions to a wide variety of challenges, some of which I will explain here in the hope of conveying how my translation and production came to be the way they were.

The first challenge I faced, as Fernando Degiovanni, my advisor in the translation process, pointed out to me, was developing a theoretical approach to translation appropriate to the task at hand. After surveying a cross-section of the vast body of work on the theory of translation, I soon understood that I was undertaking not just a translation across languages, but also a translation through time. In addition to translating from Spanish into English, I had to translate from a literary form that was unfamiliar to my audience into one that was. Two

concepts from the theory of translation were of particular navigational help in this journey across language and time: the dynamic potential of translation, and the foreignizing/domesticating dichotomy.

The goal of the translator as commonly understood—to recreate the original in new language—is patently impossible. The language and the content of a text are far too intricately intertwined. What a translator can do, however, is to create a new text that reaches both into the past and into the future. This is the dynamic potential of translation: the recasting of the past into a form that people can appreciate and enjoy in the future. This process entails an inevitable loss by excluding certain readings and interpretations, but if done well, it makes up for this loss by opening the door for new and different interpretations. The original, which might otherwise fade away, is thus reincarnated and given new life.¹

To fully realize this dynamic potential, it is necessary to find a balance between what Lawrence Venuti calls the domesticating and foreignizing impulses in translation. There is a strong tendency, when translating, to replace unfamiliar idioms and turns of phrase from the original language with familiar ones from the target language, making the result more accessible to its audience. In such domesticating translations, however, there is often a lack of respect for the original and its cultural context, which detracts from the value of the translation. On the other hand, a foreignizing translation that attempts to preserve too many of the original idioms and contextual references necessarily restricts its own

¹ Sandra Bermann, "Translating History," *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, eds. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 269-73.

audience.² I attempted in my translation, not necessarily to find a middle path between these two approaches, but as much as possible to employ the advantages of each while avoiding their pitfalls.

A second initial challenge was the decision whether to create a translation in verse or in prose. The original is written in verse, as was the norm in the Spanish Golden Age, but I questioned whether a verse translation would be the most appropriate in my particular case. In the seventeenth century there was a much closer connection between drama and poetry than there is today, as a scene in the play itself demonstrates. When Juana tells Antonio in II.2 that her lady Serafina is planning to rehearse for a *comedia* (a play), his response is to ask if she is inclined to *versos* (poetry), as if the two genres were almost interchangeable. Moreover, the text manages to convey sometimes subtle shifts in tone and register by switching from one type of verse to another. A clear example of this is the transition between the first two scenes in the play, when the hendecasyllable *octavas* of the Duke and Count give way to the freer, more flexible octosyllable *redondillas* of the comic characters Tarso and Melisa. Another example is Mireno's soliloquy after exchanging clothes in I.3, which appears in the original as a sonnet.

Even taking into consideration the richness of the original poetic verse, I decided that I would be better off making a prose translation. I am not a poet, and I knew that to adapt the Spanish original to a suitably accessible English verse

² Lawrence Venuti, "Translation and National Identities," *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, eds. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 182-83, 91-92.

would be incredibly difficult. Indeed, the verse translation of *El vergonzoso* by John Browning and Fiorigio Minelli, to which I often referred for clarification throughout the translation process, struck me on the whole as rather stilted.³ Nevertheless, it was necessary to somehow convey in prose the information that Tirso's original conveyed through its versification. At the suggestion of Professor Degiovanni, I did this by maintaining a clear division between the various social registers of language in the play, in terms of both vocabulary and syntax.

Specifically, I echoed the longer hendecasyllable verses of the nobility with longer, more complex sentences in English. This is especially true in the first scene, since it serves to set the stage for the rest of the play. The opening dialogue between the Count and the Duke establishes the nobility of these characters, while at the same time advising the audience that the play will make substantial use of literary language. After this introduction, the second scene establishes the comic characters Tarso and Melisa as ones who will speak with a simpler language, one that will allow them to connect more easily with the audience. The first sentences spoken by the Duke and by Tarso illustrate this distinction well: "At your request I've arranged for us to meet here in this thicket, don Duarte, while my huntsmen give chase to a wild boar" (the Duke, I.1), and "Melisa, go bark up someone else's tree" (Tarso, I.2).

³ Tirso de Molina, "The Bashful Man at Court," trans. John Browning and Fiorigio Minelli, Three Plays by Tirso De Molina, Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1991).

There is one section of the play where I decided to preserve the verse form: the lines Serafina recites in II.4 when she is rehearsing for a play. I wanted to remind the audience that seventeenth-century plays were written this way, even though my translation took the form of dramatic prose. I chose Elizabethan style blank verse, complete with archaic pronouns, conjugations and contractions (*thy*, *wouldst*, *'tis*, etc.), since this was the style in which Shakespeare and other English contemporaries of Tirso were writing at the time. Using this style also emphasized the meta-theatrical nature of the scene, which consists of a play-within-a-play prefaced by a speech extolling the virtues of the theater. In this case, the benefits outweighed the risk of alienating the audience through an abrupt switch into verse.

A third challenge I faced in the process of translation was figuring out how to deal with the heightened linguistic style that Tirso uses throughout the play, particularly but by no means exclusively for the more sophisticated characters. This style makes extensive use of complex syntax and hyperbaton, which can be bewildering for an audience that has come to expect the use of generally naturalistic language on the stage. The difficulty of presenting heightened language to a contemporary audience will be familiar to anyone who has participated in a production of one of Shakespeare's plays. A common solution is to focus on the action of the plot at the expense of the language, assuming that the language, left to its own devices, will bore the audience. However, this approach ignores the fact that the language can be the most interesting part of the

play. The plot of a comedy, in particular, is formulaic; everyone knows how it's going to end.

Talking with Michael Armstrong-Roche, my advisor in the editing and production phase, I came to understand that the key to working with a play that uses heightened language is to truly allow the language full play. This means acknowledging all of the insinuations and *double entendres*, while presenting them in a way that focuses on making the meaning clear. For instance, I made sure to maintain the imagery of swords, pens and tongues that runs throughout the play, often carrying with it a degree of sexual suggestiveness. Moreover, while I simplified the syntax in many places where the complexity appeared to add nothing to the meaning, I tried never to oversimplify the language or to make it naturalistic. To do so would have meant giving up such delightfully poetic flights of fancy as this line, spoken by don Antonio when he first sees Serafina: “Through my eyes, my soul drinks flames of love mixed with snow from the crystal glass of her pale divinity” (I.4).

Some of the Spanish puns and malapropisms that contribute to the richness of Tirso's language are simply untranslatable, in which cases I attempted to replace them with English ones of similar effect. Such was the case with the final line in Act I, which in the original contains a pun on the name *Serafina* and the phrase *será fin* (“will be the end”). In my translation the line reads, “I fear, dear cousin, that Serafina's spell spells the end of all my life and happiness.”

A final area of difficulty in translating was the number of cultural and literary references that Tirso makes over the course of the play that are obsolete for most contemporary American audiences. Most of these do not pertain particularly to Spanish culture, but rather to Classical mythology, such as the references to Numa in I.1 and to Clytia in I.6, or to Italian chivalric *romanzi* popular in the day, such as the reference to Medoro in II.4. In all of these cases, the problem is that the entire reference in the original consists simply of a name that is unfamiliar to most Americans today. Professor Degiovanni encouraged me to be consistent in my treatment of these references, and so wherever possible, I opted not to delete them or to replace them with familiar parallels, but rather to add a brief explanation. Thus, the Count refers to “Numa, that saintly king,” and Juana refers to “Clytia... the nymph whose love of the sun turned her into a sunflower.” The translation of Browning and Minelli was of great help in elucidating the meaning of many obscure references and expressions. By adopting this somewhat didactic approach I was able to preserve a good deal of the cultural context of the original at the relatively small expense of a few extra words.

Production

Once the translation was complete, I switched from being a translator to being a director, a switch that involved a significant change in how I viewed the play. As a translator, my product was a text; as a director, my product was a performance. With this new goal in mind, I proceeded to my first major task as a

director: cutting down the script to a reasonable size. I knew that a college audience in 2009 would not want to sit through a play that went much over two hours, and the complete translation would undoubtedly have done so.

One approach to cutting would have been to target the long monologues, with their flowery rhetoric and small importance to the plot. To do so, however, would have meant cutting some of the best language in the script, and as I have said, it is really the language that makes the play. I believed it would be better to cut inconsequential pieces of dialogue, or even whole scenes, as long as the flow of the storyline remained strong. This turned out to be a challenging task, as a close examination revealed that very little in the play was truly inconsequential. I initially feared that I would have to cut whole characters and plotlines from the play, but with a good deal of much-appreciated editorial assistance from Professor Armstrong-Roche, I managed to whittle the script down to a workable length without needing to take such drastic measures. Most of the cuts involved simply tightening up the dialogue throughout the play, making it mirror more closely the compressed and efficient style of Tirso's original. An unpublished translation by Harley Erdman showed clearly to what extent the text could be condensed, and provided a helpful counter-example to that of Browning and Minelli.⁴ Even more helpful was the cooperation of the actors, who, at my request, suggested changes to lines that sounded awkward or overwrought to their ears.

⁴ Tirso de Molina, *The Outcast In*, trans. Harley Erdman (1993).

Where I deleted whole lines, they were generally the lines of minor characters. The greatest cuts affected the dialogue of Ruy, Vasco and the posse in I.3 (originally three separate scenes), and that of Lauro, Ruy and the shepherds in III.1. I also consolidated two of the shepherd characters (Bato and Denio), for the sake of both brevity and clarity. The one content-based cut I made consistently was to remove the scatological humor of the *graciosos* (comic supporting characters), which consisted mainly of repeated references to Tarso's soiled breeches. Such humor might have won cheap laughs, but for a modern audience, it would have been an obstacle to the establishment of a sympathetic connection with the characters. The *graciosos* are comical in their physicality and simplicity, but they are by no means stupid, and I did not want them to come across as such.

As a director, I also had to face the consequences of the decisions I had made as translator. Maintaining much of the heightened language of the original meant working long hours with actors, finding creative ways to bring the language of the play to life. Sets, lighting, costumes and complex choreography all took a back seat to developing the actors' delivery. It was clear from the beginning that the production would succeed only if they could effectively communicate the meaning of the lines, while at the same time engaging the audience in the wordplay that pervades the script. A large part of this task involved finding and playing up both the comic and the sexually suggestive potential of more than just the obvious lines, though never to the point of being crude. A clear example of this potential is in II.1, when Madalena asks Mireno to rise from where he is

kneeling. “I would rather remain here, my lady,” he replies, where “here” is a position in which (with the proper blocking) his head is at the level of her waist.

I only had five weeks to rehearse the play with the cast, but I was fortunate to have an energetic and cooperative group of actors who, in that extremely short period of time, came to really own the lines they spoke on stage. It was thrilling to watch as they progressed from simply reciting the words on the page to a delivery that conveyed the meaning(s) of a line as well as the motivation of the character speaking it. For instance, the actress who played Madalena was initially uncomfortable standing still and delivering her several long soliloquies, but as she developed a deeper understanding of the character, her awkwardness subsided. With more time we certainly could have further reduced the sense of stiltedness that still hung on in some scenes; however, judging from the enthusiastic response of our audiences—who laughed in all the right places—the effort we invested paid off handsomely.

In order to help the actors become familiar and comfortable with the characters and their motivations, I had to understand a good deal about the original context of Tirso’s play. I knew a little about the Spanish Golden Age theater, but I quickly realized that I needed to know more. What I learned was that Tirso and his contemporaries, like playwrights today, faced the challenge of creating plays that appealed to the interests of a diverse audience. Some audience members came to see romance, others for drama and suspense, and others for crude jokes and physical humor. Some came to hear social critique, while others

had the power to punish the playwright if that critique went too far. The solution these playwrights developed was a new genre of play, the *comedia nueva*, which combined all these different aspects. Serafina's speech about the theater in II.4, a remarkable panegyric that transcends the plot in which it appears, pays tribute to exactly this capacity of the *comedia* to cater to a wide variety of tastes (while at the same time defending it against attacks from moralistic critics).

The roots of the *comedia* reach back to the New Comedy of ancient Greece, which built upon earlier comedic forms largely through the incorporation of young lovers as the main characters. New Comedy, handed down in large part through the Roman writers Terence and Plautus, has served as the foundation for the Western romantic comedy tradition right through to the television sit-coms of the present day, and from it we derive such stock characters as the swooning lover, the grumpy old man, and the clever servant.⁵ Thus, at the suggestion of Professor Armstrong-Roche, I drew ideas for staging and delivery from 1940's screwball comedy and the films of Pedro Almodóvar, as well as from Golden Age sources such as Pilar Miró's film adaptation of Lope de Vega's *El perro del hortelano*.⁶ In particular, I encouraged the whole cast to watch James Stewart and Katherine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story*, as an example of a film that creates an exquisite blend of humor, subtle suggestiveness, and sophistication.

⁵ R. J. Darius, "Comedy," *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

⁶ Pilar Miró, *El Perro Del Hortelano*, Motion picture, Disney Iberia, Spain, 1996.

The developers of the Spanish *comedia nueva* drew directly from the New Comedy tradition, a connection made possible by the renewed interest in Classical literature sparked by contemporary humanism, but it was by no means their only source. Another important source was the prominent medieval tradition of church-sponsored liturgical plays and processions, the influence of which stretches from the English mystery play to the modern Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. *Comedia* playwrights also drew from the "lower" jongleuresque tradition of street performers and balladeers. This ability to combine the sacred and profane, the high and the low, contributed greatly to the success of the *comedia*.⁷ And the *comedia* was nothing if not successful. Demand for new plays was so great by the end of the sixteenth century that the typical run for a play was only three to five performances. To keep up with this demand, playwrights churned out high-quality works at a truly astounding rate. There are over 300 extant plays by Lope de Vega alone.⁸

One factor contributing to this prolific output was the fact that Lope and his contemporaries had established a flexible but recognizable paradigm for all *comedias*. The plays were written in polymetric verse and organized into three acts, and they combined high and low social and linguistic registers as well as both comic and tragic elements. They were designed to please heterogeneous audiences

⁷ Bruce R. Burningham, "Placing the *Comedia* in Performative Context," Approaches to Teaching Early Modern Spanish Drama, eds. Laura R. Bass and Margaret R. Greer (New York: MLA, 2006) 109-10.

⁸ Melveena McKendrick, Theatre in Spain, 1490-1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 72.

and to appeal to them with theatrical and rhetorical variety.⁹ Within this paradigm, playwrights were able to draw on a wealth of printed source material, including historical chronicles, epics, folk tales, Bible stories, saints' lives, songbooks, and collections of ballads and proverbs.¹⁰ Within the *comedia* as a whole, there was also a similar variety of sub-genres, each with its own conventional plot structure, such as honor tragedy, philosophical drama, theological drama, history and political plays, peasant drama, and marriage comedy.

This last sub-genre, to which *El vergonzoso* belongs, follows most closely the Classical New Comedy model. In these plays, the story revolves around a young lover (the *galán*) and the obstacles, often in the form of a rival suitor or a protective father, that he must overcome in order to be with the lady he loves. Along the way he is supported, though also often ridiculed, by a comic servant (the *gracioso*, or clown), who embodies a subtle combination of simplicity and wit. By the end of the play, all obstacles are overcome, and all couples are married.¹¹ In the case of *El vergonzoso*, Mireno (the principle *galán*) faces both a rival suitor and a protective father, but the greatest obstacle of all is that of the caste barrier. He finally manages to overcome those obstacles, but not without help from Tarso (his *gracioso*), and even more importantly, his lady Madalena.

⁹ Lope de Vega, *El Arte Nuevo De Hacer Comedias En Este Tiempo*, ed. Juana de José Prades (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1971) 285, 95-96.

¹⁰ Jodi Campbell, *Monarchy, Political Culture, and Drama in Seventeenth-Century Madrid: Theater of Negotiation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) 33.

¹¹ Ignacio Arellano, *Historia Del Teatro Español Del Siglo XVII* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995) 122-29.

While Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca are generally considered the masters of the *comedia* formula, the reputation of Tirso de Molina (c. 1580-1648) is not far behind. Born Gabriel Téllez, his pseudonym derives from the Greek *thyrsos*, the staff of the wine god Dionysus, to whom most ancient Greek theater was devoted. Tirso most likely attended the university at Alcalá de Henares before entering the Order of Mercy in about 1600.¹² *El vergonzoso en palacio* was one of his earlier plays, though there is some debate over the exact date of composition, since Tirso did not publish the play until 1624. Everett Hesse suggests a date in 1606 or shortly thereafter, while Blanca de los Ríos places it in 1611-12.¹³ In any case, Tirso at the time was a newly ordained priest, living in the cultural center of Toledo and still in the early stages of both his religious and his dramaturgical careers. The former would see him sent to lecture on theology in Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic), and later appointed official historian of his order. The latter would earn him a reputation as a great man of letters, but would also lead to his expulsion from Madrid for causing scandal “with the profane and ill-purposed *comedias* he writes” (my translation).¹⁴

Tirso was a member of the rapidly growing courtier class in Spain, the rise of which paralleled the decline of the landed nobility both in Spain and across Europe. The growing dependency of the government on administrators, whose skill with the pen was more important than their skill with the sword, called into

¹² A. Robert Lauer, Tirso De Molina, 24 March 2004 2002, Web-page, University of Oklahoma, Available: <http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/A-Robert.R.Lauer-1/SPAN4183BTirso.html>, 10 March 2009.

¹³ Arellano, Historia Del Teatro Español Del Siglo XVII 365.

¹⁴ Tirso de Molina, El Vergonzoso En Palacio, ed. Everett Hesse (Madrid: Cátedra, 1990) 13-15.

question the traditional supremacy of the landed elite.¹⁵ There are clear reflections of this social situation in Tirso's writing. His choice of Portugal in 1400 as the setting for *El vergonzoso* drew on a long tradition of the "Portuguese lover" in Spanish literature, but it also gave him the liberty to comment indirectly on issues such as class mobility and political authority without raising aristocratic hackles. Mireno, like Tirso, is (or at least believes himself to be) an upwardly-mobile commoner who makes his living among the aristocracy through the skilled use of his pen. At the same time don Antonio, who knows he is a count, lowers himself both intentionally and through his ignoble actions, while the Duke, despite being the highest ranking nobleman in the play, is unable to force his daughters to marry the husbands he has chosen. The actors needed to understand these social dynamics in order to act appropriately in relation to one another, as well as when they were alone.

The issue of marriage choice was also one of great interest at the time, as aristocratic families moved away from an understanding of marriage in which the father chose spouses for his children for political and economic reasons. The Catholic Church, of which Tirso was an ordained priest, had recently reaffirmed in the Council of Trent its policy that choosing one's own spouse was a sacred expression of one's God-given free will. Despite this shift, however, individual and family honor was still a highly important concept, and disobeying one's father could have serious consequences, as the Duke's very real threats against Madalena

¹⁵ Richard L. Kagan, *Students and Society in Early Modern Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) xviii-xix.

in III.7 demonstrate.¹⁶ It was absolutely necessary for the actors, particularly those playing the Duke and Madalena, to understand what was at stake in these questions of honor, integrity and obedience.

A final challenge in the staging of the play (not counting the technical issues that any production faces) was figuring out how to deal with the large number of asides in Tirso's original. Many of these lines, such as those of the Count in I.1, seemed to seriously interrupt the flow of the play. I was initially tempted to do away with all of them, but as the rehearsal process progressed, I came to realize their true value, and even asked the actors to deliver some lines as asides that were not designated as such in the original. When delivered well, asides facilitate a connection between those on the stage and those watching them. Skillfully played as a sour confession straight to the audience, the Count's first aside, ending in "...and once I'd had my way, I ditched her," earned a hearty laugh in each performance. Even more importantly, the asides tacitly acknowledge the artifice of the play (unlike heightened language, theatrical self-awareness is a value shared by seventeenth- and much of twentieth-century theater). In doing so, they remind the audience that what they are watching is not in any way meant to be understood as true or real in a traditional sense.

The subtle ways that reality, theatricality and deception relate to each other, and contribute to self-definition, comprise one of the play's most basic underlying themes. Through asides, and through remarks on the dreamlike

¹⁶ Patricia Seed, To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) 33-34.

unreality of the action taking place, the actors make the audience complicit in an exploration of the play's artifice. This theme is taken up in the very first scene by the Duke, when he remarks, "Am I dreaming this or am I mad?" and is explored further in Serafina's play rehearsal scene (II.4) and Madalena's feigned sleep-talking scene (III.3). The sense of complicity with the audience reaches a peak in the final scene, when all the play's couples are married off, whether they like it or not. This ending is ridiculously contrived, and can succeed only through a staging that freely admits so, and holds absolutely no pretense of plausibility.

Despite the large number of challenges I faced along the way, I knew that a successful translation of *El vergonzoso* was possible because so much of Tirso's original has such enduring validity. Many sources of dramatic tension in the seventeenth century were the same as they are today, such as social class interactions, marriage choice, and familial authority. On an even more fundamental level, the basic pretense of the romantic comedy has changed very little over the centuries, and continues to be a source of entertainment in a wide variety of media. These instances of universality make translation possible, but it is the specific context of Golden Age Spain that gives Tirso's play its particular appeal. Without this context, it would be simply a dull repetition of familiar tropes and clichés. The balancing act of translation consists in using the elements of universality in a text as a means of conveying its unique, culturally specific content across space and time, opening it to new audiences and new interpretations.

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The Shy Courtier

Cast of Characters

The Duke of Avero:	An old man
Don Duarte:	The Count of Estremoz
Two Hunters	
Figueredo:	The Duke's valet
Tarso:	A shepherd
Melisa:	A shepherdess
Mireno:	A shepherd
Ruy Lorenzo:	The Duke's secretary
Vasco:	Ruy Lorenzo's footman
Doristo:	The village mayor
Lariso:	A shepherd
Denio:	A shepherd
Doña Juana:	A lady in waiting
Don Antonio:	The Count of Penela
Doña Madalena:	The Duke's older daughter
Doña Serafina:	The Duke's younger daughter
A Painter	
Lauro:	Mireno's father, an old man

Scene

In and around Avero, northern Portugal.

Time

1400.

ACT IScene 1

SETTING: A forest near Averro.

AT RISE: The COUNT anxiously paces the stage. The DUKE enters. Both are in hunting apparel.

DUKE

At your request I've arranged for us to meet here in this thicket, don Duarte, while my huntsmen give chase to a wild boar. But as I organized this hunting party to celebrate your coming to my court, I cannot fathom what perturbed and perplexed motive would lead you to abandon the hunt and speak to me alone.

COUNT

Enough dissembling. Unsheathe your steel, which, like Numa, that saintly king, you've forgotten at your side. This naked blade before you, Duke of Averro, will shortly give my reply. The sword must serve as tongue to the dishonored knight, not the pen, and mutely, it broadcasts your shame.

(Brief sword fight; the DUKE knocks the COUNT'S sword away.)

DUKE

The sword is indeed a tongue, for it looks like one—and since you've let yours babble baseless accusations, let us hold our tongues and allow our blades to speak for us. Unless you're ready to explain yourself (I'll give you a small chance, as befits the pettiness of your conduct). My honor owes you nothing.

COUNT

Splendid! You really think you can conceal the crimes against which heaven itself testifies?

DUKE

What crimes, Count?

COUNT

You may wish to hide behind your age and dignity, sir Duke, but I won't be deceived. The proof is in this letter, signed and sealed by your own hand.

(thrusting the letter at the DUKE)

Take it—it's yours. The servant you bribed to kill me is bronze-like in his loyalty, and your offer could not breach so thick a wall. Since you ordered in writing that

DUKE (Cont.)

he take my life, in my own house, do not wonder if I say you'd rather wield a pen than a sword, as befits a gentleman.

DUKE

I, order you killed?

COUNT

This seal, is it not yours?

DUKE

It is.

COUNT

And can you deny this signature?

DUKE

Am I dreaming this or am I mad?

COUNT

Read the letter and you'll know why I want my revenge.

DUKE (reading)

"March 12, 1400. From the Duke, at his castle in Averro: For the retribution of certain crimes, which can only be satisfied by the death of don Duarte, Count of Estremoz, I place my trust in you. That this trust may prove well-founded, I ask that you, as the Count's personal valet, carry out my revenge. When you are done, make haste to my castle where I will safeguard and reward you for the danger in which you have placed yourself for my sake. This letter is your guarantee, but once you have read it, return it to the messenger, remembering always the importance of both haste and secrecy. THE DUKE."

COUNT

I know not what injury the house of Estremoz, of which I am Count, has done you to so debase a noble breast that flows with the ancient blood of the Dukes of Averro.

DUKE

A traitor has forged my signature and seal, a man who harbors a secret grievance, whereby he intends with your death to effect my perpetual disgrace. Heaven, which knows my innocence, knows the author of this crime, and knows too that never, in presence or in absence, in act, in speech, or in writing, have I ever sought your harm. I defer, if you are willing, to the test of time. If all goes well, this very afternoon I'll discover our cowardly author. I confess the justice of your

DUKE (Cont.)

complaint, but until I am able to satisfy you, I beg that you suspend your just anger and calm your troubled breast.

COUNT

I am contented, Your Grace... for now.

(The two HUNTERS enter.)

HUNTER 1

What a boar!

HUNTER 2

We went after it, but it had these *huge* tusks, and even with the hounds on its scent it managed to get away.

DUKE

I'm sure you've left not a single deer, roe or boar alive in the forest. Is there much prey?

HUNTER 1

Let's just say your mules won't be going home with light loads.

(FIGUEREDO enters.)

FIGUEREDO (aside)

That dastardly secretary!

DUKE

What's all the commotion about, Figueredo?

FIGUEREDO

Thank God I've found you—treason, sir! A plot hatched by your secretary to kill the Count of Estremoz! You owe me your life, Count.

COUNT (aside)

I can guess the reason for this secretary's ill-plotted revenge. I seduced his sister, the beautiful Leonela, and once I'd had my way, I ditched her.

DUKE

Thank heaven for justifying the innocent! How was this plot exposed?

FIGUEREDO

The traitor hired a thug and, for good measure, told him that you, sir, gave the command. But this thug happened to be in love and men in love, as you know, are as free with their tongues as with their money. They say the bed is a rack where women torture men, not with ropes but with kisses. He gave away the plan to his mistress and she swore secrecy. But whatever a man plants in a woman is bound to come out one way or another. If she conceived through the ear, she gave birth through the mouth, and by noontime everyone in Avero knew. They arrested the man and the secretary, Ruy Lorenzo, escaped with his footman.

DUKE

You see, Count, how Providence takes care to reveal the truth and prove my innocence.

COUNT

I know not what to say—only that your secretary, schooled in wiles, made me lose my temper. But who wouldn't be deceived by a false pen?

DUKE

Henceforth I'll take more care in my choice of a secretary.

COUNT

If secrecy is what you're after, I'd recommend valuing loyalty over intelligence.

DUKE

It's a miracle you've escaped with your life.

COUNT

What's important is that treason is on the run and the pure light of truth has been affirmed.

DUKE

For such a traitor, the greatest torture is but little.

COUNT (aside)

Leonela's revenge is behind all this. I'll have to ensure that the Duke remains in the dark about it, just though her cause may be.

DUKE

Whoever brings me the culprit, dead or alive, wins his forfeited estate.

HUNTER 2

Not a soul in the county will fail to take you up on that, sir.

DUKE

His punishment will be an example to all the kingdom.

COUNT

I owe you my life, my friend.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 2

SETTING: Another part of the forest.

AT RISE: TARSO bursts onstage, pursued by MELISA.

MELISA

You'd leave me just like that, you traitor?

TARSO

Melisa, go bark up someone else's tree. Your love just doesn't make me feel the way it used to. It's been half a year since I last saw you, and since then I've gotten over whatever illness made me love you. I put my love on a diet, and little by little, I've recovered my health. I'm no longer mad because I'm no longer a poet. My God, the poems I used to compose for you! I climbed up Mt. Parnassus to borrow words from the Muses themselves, but all I ended up with was blisters on my feet. I called you "my moon," "my evening star"... There wasn't a single thing I saw in you whose praises I didn't sing. I made up couplets about your laugh, your sweet smile, your white skin, your dark eyes, your haughty airs, your silence, your talking, your sighing, your walking, your crying, your sitting, your coughing, your spitting... I think one time I even wrote a sonnet about the little drop of snot that hangs off the end of your nose. Now I've escaped from the net you caught me in, thank God, and I don't give a damn about you or your love.

MELISA

Tarso! You're such a... man! How could a little absence make you lose your respect for me?

TARSO

You and Judas would see eye to eye. You're a turncoat. You put on a new face and expect me to come running back to you.

MELISA

Fine! Then give me back all those love tokens I gave you, those pretty little ribbons and locks of my hair...

TARSO

You think I still keep those in a pouch around my neck like I used to? As if I'd rub salt in the wound. Those locks of hair you used to tie up my hopes, those cruel ribbons, roses, letters, cards... They had me bewitched, so I did what I had to to lift the spell: I burned them. I even burned the pouch—it was contaminated.

MELISA (crying)

I refuse to put up with this!

TARSO

Cry me a river. I know you too well by now—you're a sly one. Well you're not going to trick me, by God, so you can just cry until you piss yourself.

MELISA

Traitor!

TARSO

What a show! I get it; you can turn off the hose now.

MELISA

I'll make you pay for this.

TARSO

How?

MELISA

By getting married, you heartless swine.

TARSO

You might as well beat yourself with your own shoe.

MELISA

Just go away.

TARSO

Fine by me.

(He begins to exit.)

MELISA

You're going to leave just like that?

TARSO

Yes, just like this, see? Walking.

(He begins to exit again.)

MELISA

Wait! I bet I know why you pretend not to love me anymore.

TARSO

I bet you don't.

MELISA

You're just jealous of your friend Mireno.

TARSO

Me, jealous? Oh, that's a good one! I grew up with Mireno, I even broke bread with him, and I'm proud to serve him and his father, Lauro. He's a good, upstanding man, and for my part you're welcome to him. But he's a free spirit, and as far as I can tell he's not falling in love with anyone any time soon. His father brought him here as a kid, and you know what people say, that even though he walks around just like us, if you take off his shepherd's cloak, like the bark off a tree, you'll find some kind of nobility. There's not a single shepherd in all of El Miño who doesn't look up to him, or a girl who doesn't sigh when he walks by, but Fortune seems to have made him as deaf to their sighs as Narcissus was to Echo. And now, since he's ignoring you, you come running back to me. Well there's no entrance here; this door is locked.

MELISA

You really don't love me, do you?

TARSO

No.

MELISA (crossing herself)

Well I swear by God, you'll pay for this.

TARSO

You'll make me pay?

MELISA

That's right. You'll see soon enough if I don't make you regret this. Nothing like a little rejection to change a man's mind.

TARSO

I suppose that's true...

MELISA

Mark my words. There's a certain shepherd you'll be interested to know. When love goes astray, a shepherd will always bring it home again.

(MELISA exits.)

TARSO

Oh yeah, well good riddance!

TARSO (Cont., aside)

You know, she might actually mean that. A woman like that's a match for the Devil himself!

(MIRENO enters.)

MIRENO

Tarso, I've been looking for you all day.

TARSO

I ran into Melisa, and she wouldn't let me go. The more she cried, the harder it was for me to keep from laughing. But Mireno, what's going on?

MIRENO

Tarso, I know how much you care about me, which is why I've come to talk to you.

TARSO

Is something wrong? Your father, Lauro, brought us up together, and even though I'm old enough to have my own family, you know I'd rather serve yours.

MIRENO

You don't have to prove it to me, Tarso. And though you're humble, I also know you're smart. I'm about to toss my hope, like a javelin, as far as I can, and I want you to come with me and see if we can catch it. I've been down lately, filled with all these high and lofty thoughts that don't fit the shepherd's life, though I don't know where I get them. Since fate could just as easily have made me a nobleman, I sometimes wonder how I ended up *here*. I know it's wrong, but I'm ashamed of who I am. I feel awful about it, but sometimes I've even wondered if I'm actually Lauro's son, or if maybe he took me from some nobleman's house as a baby. I must have asked him a thousand times, when we're alone, whether by any chance he used to have some higher station in life that he was then cast down from, as it happens to so many people. I know we're not from around here, and even though he dresses like a shepherd, he talks more like someone from the court. But every time I ask, he dashes my hopes, telling me all sorts of long stories that all end up at the same point: I'm nothing but the son of peasants. I know I should just forget about it, but I can't. I have to get away and follow my guiding star—somehow I know it has good things in store for me. Besides, even if I was born poor, think how much more pride I could take in pulling myself up by my bootstraps. If you want to join me, Tarso, for better or worse, it's up to you. But don't try to dissuade me; just make up your own mind fast.

TARSO

It's enough for me to see you this excited—what are we waiting for! You're wise and schooled enough to know what you're doing, and I know I'd like to come along, but I do worry about your father Lauro.

MIRENO

With luck, I'll bring him enough happiness he'll forget all his cares.

TARSO

When do we leave?

MIRENO

Now.

TARSO

Today?

MIRENO

This very minute!

TARSO

What about money?

MIRENO

I sold two oxen, and I've got the money right here. First thing we'll go straight to Avero, where we'll find you a hat and a sword!

TARSO

I just hope we don't wind up running home like dogs with our tails between our legs!

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 3

SETTING: Another part of the forest.

AT RISE: RUY steps out into the open, while VASCO stays back.

VASCO

Sir, back into the trees! I swear we won't be here an hour before the posse catches us. Every last peasant in the neighborhood is after us like hounds after a hare, and when they catch us, they'll crucify us. In our case, though, we won't be remembered for our sins—we'll be dismembered.

RUY

I'm afraid we're not long for this world, Vasco. Even if we found a way to escape, we wouldn't last for long on our own in the forest.

VASCO

Steel is no match for the arms of hunger.

RUY

I forged the Duke's signature on a letter in order to avenge my sister, who has been dishonored by the Count of Estremoz, and when that plan failed, I sought out someone to kill him for me. But the plans of the ill-fated always come to naught, and since I am such a one, let my life end now. It's wrong to die of hunger when there is a sword at hand.

VASCO

Is it really possible that someone who calls himself a man, like you, tried and true, would go to such great lengths to find out whether or not his sister was dishonored? Tell me, do you really think that in this world there has ever been a woman who was taken against her will? If Leonela didn't want the grapes picked from her vine, couldn't she curl up in a ball like a hedgehog, and with punches, scratches, kicks, screams and bites, thwart whoever dared to dishonor her, keeping the melon, as it were, untasted?

RUY

Do you doubt it? Are there not more books, legends, and paintings than I can count, full of the most violent violations?

(TARSO and MIRENO enter.)

TARSO

...I tell you, Melisa swore it to me.

RUY

I hear people coming. We're lost!

TARSO

A pretty sight it'll be when she finds out I've skipped out on her!

MIRENO

You haven't repaid her love very well.

VASCO

Blind them, Saint Anthony!

TARSO

Hand her over to Pontius Pilate. She's more fickle than a band of gypsies. Her love comes with more complicated flourishes than a song played on the organ.

RUY

Relax! It's only two peasants, who've come completely unarmed, and won't do us any harm.

VASCO

Praise be to God!

RUY

Quiet! Let's make the best of this.

(to MIRENO and TARSO)

Where are you headed, my friends?

MIRENO

Good day, sirs! To town, to stock up. And you, where are you headed? This path leads away from the royal road to those huts at the foot of the mountains.

RUY

My good shepherd, your words declare your kindness, so I'll be frank. To avenge my sister's dishonor, I tried to kill a powerful man, and now that the Duke has discovered my honorable plot, he has ordered his people to follow me through this wilderness until they have captured me. Despairing of escape, I've taken the high road. I may as well give my life up: though honorable, I've no way out.

MIRENO

What a sad tale! If the same miserable fate that made me a poor shepherd had given me more courage, I'd take up your cause myself. What we can do, if you'll accept my advice, is swap clothes: if you take these humble garments of mine, you can win time for yourself till the coast is clear.

RUY

May heaven reward you for this favor, since I cannot.

MIRENO

Let's take cover in the woods and exchange our outfits.

(RUY and MIRENO exit.)

TARSO

Does this mean I have to wear that get-up of yours? It has more colors and parts than the innards on a butcher's floor.

VASCO

Looks that way.

TARSO

Well, you'll have to give me a lesson or two in how to put them on, since they have more entrances and exits than the city of Troy.

VASCO

Let's go, you'll figure it out soon enough.

(They exit. DORISTO, LARISO and DENIO cross the stage, searching. MIRENO, RUY and VASCO enter, having exchanged costumes.)

MIRENO

Where's Tarso?

VASCO

He's over there untangling his breeches, since he still hasn't figured out how to tie them properly.

MIRENO

You should get going.

RUY

Time won't erase the memory of this favor.

VASCO

I'm a footman stuffed like a sausage into a shepherd's casing.

(RUY and VASCO exit.)

MIRENO

The purebred horse, left to its own devices, is content with the grass of the field and the hard iron bit. But once its owner dresses it up for a holiday with a gold-enameled harness, it starts puffing and snorting and tearing up the grass, harness jingling wildly. In the same way, I have grown up among the oak trees, speaking a rough tongue and wearing a rougher coat. Yet as with the horse, this courtly dress has awakened my nobler thoughts, my pride increased by proud attire.

(TARSO enters.)

TARSO

Would you look at these fabrications they're making me wear? I can't wrap my head around such highfalutin figments. Just look at all these crisscrossed streets and intersections. Have you ever seen so many slices, except on a melon? Or any astrologer's globe that was tougher to understand? I've had them for an hour and I still can't find the pockets.

MIRENO

That's enough, Tarso.

TARSO

You shouldn't be surprised: they're clearly not the work of man.

MIRENO

What else would they be the work of?

TARSO

Magic! These are worthy of Merlin himself, since even the wisest men couldn't make heads or tails of them. Anyhow, now that I'm footmanified, and you're a gentleman, what do we do now?

MIRENO

We head for Avero. This outfit has lifted up my thoughts and I think we should aim higher.

TARSO

You may well want to loft yourself right up into heaven, but we'll probably end up back down in the mud. But anyway, since you're a new man now and you might want to pass as a courtier, shouldn't you consider changing your name? *Mireno* doesn't sound very lordly to me.

MIRENO

You're right. If it's true I'm not a shepherd anymore, Mireno no longer suits me. Don Dionís is a renowned and respected name in Portugal. So from this day forward, don Dionís is what I'll be.

TARSO

Not a bad choice. The kings who've had that name have all brought honor to it. Of course, I'll need a new name too, one that fits these new breeches of mine.

MIRENO

Choose one yourself.

TARSO

Let's see, I choose, I mean, if it's OK...?

MIRENO

What?

TARSO

Gómez Brito. What do you think?

MIRENO

Perfect.

TARSO

That's pretty good! We're not even bishops, and we've given ourselves new confirmation names.

(DORISTO, LARISO and DENIO enter,
with ropes.)

LARISO

Unless they can fly, they've got to be somewhere in these bushes.

DENIO

Let's look for them in the woods.

LARISO

Ain't that them?

DORISTO

Shhh!

LARISO

By God, they match the descriptions.

DORISTO

They don't got any weapons on 'em. Tie 'em up.

DENIO

Surrender, sir!

LARISO

Yield to the King!

DORISTO

Yield to the mayor!

(They catch MIRENO and TARSO from behind and tie them up.)

MIRENO

What's going on?

TARSO

Why are you tying us up?

DORISTO

You know how to be all smart when you're plotting to murder the Count, and then you ask us why we're tying you up?

TARSO

What Count? What murder? We've never even met.

DORISTO

The hangman will string you up like a fish by the guts, and by the Adam's apple too.

MIRENO

If only I had a sword, I'd make you regret this.

TARSO

It's these clothes that've landed us in this pickle. By God, don Dionís, is this the reward we get for services rendered? How'd you fall for this?

DORISTO

What are you yammering on about?

TARSO

I don't want to be Brito anymore, I want to be Tarso. I want to be a shepherd, not a footman. Take these breeches and give me back my smock. I'd rather be a slave in Egypt than starve like the Hebrews in the desert.

LARISO

Enough! Let's get going to Avero.

MIRENO

Take heart, we're going to Avero after all. When the Duke sees us for who we are, we'll be freed.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 4

SETTING: A room in the DUKE'S palace.

AT RISE: JUANA is alone onstage. ANTONIO enters, in traveling clothes.

JUANA

Cousin Antonio!

ANTONIO

Hush, don't call me that! You must act as if you don't know me, so the Duke won't find out I'm in Averro. I'm on my way to Galicia on behalf of the King, don Juan of Castile. But I had to stop just to see if it's true what everyone says, that the Duke of Averro's daughters are the most beautiful girls in all of Spain. You're their lady in waiting, so tell me, is it true?

JUANA

There are sights to see and admire here for sure, but you don't have to be in such a hurry that you can't spend some time with me.

ANTONIO

My dear doña Juana, if the Duke recognizes me, he'll oblige me to stay a while, and then I'm liable to fall out of favor with the King.

JUANA

Well in that case, I suppose I'll have to let you go. But if the Duke finds out that Antonio de Barcelo, the Count of Penela, has been in his house in secret, when he could have served him properly, he won't be very pleased. No gentleman has ever visited without a royal welcome.

ANTONIO

I know, I know. The Duke is, after all, of royal blood. But tell me, are his daughters really as beautiful as everyone says they are?

JUANA

Do you ask out of curiosity, or has Cupid, that blind god, by any chance struck your soul with his arrows?

ANTONIO

Cupid's sparks can hardly make me love them when I haven't had the pleasure of seeing them. Call it boyish curiosity that brings me to Averro.

JUANA

I'm sorry to hear you say that. I really think that our great nation should outdo all others at least where love is concerned. And so, since all Castilians have to do is fall in love at first sight for Cupid to come rushing to their side, we Portuguese will just have to fall in love at first hearing. Take it from me, the Duke's daughters merit all the praises that come their way. The older one, Madalena, would make Clytia jealous all over again, the nymph whose love of the sun turned her into a sunflower. The Duke of Braganza is set on a match between her and his son, the Count of Vasconcelos. And then there's Serafina, whose beauty is truly divine.

ANTONIO

And which of the two do *you* think is the most beautiful?

JUANA

I'd have to lean toward the older one, though I think I may be in the minority. But there's no point arguing over tastes, and even less so over love. Avero is divided into two camps, and both can make a good case.

ANTONIO

Listen, I must see them this afternoon, since I'm short on time.

JUANA

I'll arrange it so that their beauty might make a few stabs at your heart.

ANTONIO

Serafina or Madalena?

JUANA

I'm not sure—they're both beautiful. But here they come with the Duke, so let's hide.

(They hide. The DUKE, COUNT,
SERAFINA and MADALENA enter.)

DUKE

I tell you, don Duarte, everything will be done just so.

COUNT

Since the King has approved the Duke of Braganza's son's suit for your eldest daughter's hand, it is now for Your Grace to set down in writing that the beautiful doña Serafina will be mine.

DUKE

So be it.

COUNT

I believe the King will favor this match as well.

DUKE

Let us not tell Serafina, however, until we know the King has approved it. She's still just a girl and doesn't yet know that her freedom will soon be captive to the yoke of matrimony.

JUANA (to ANTONIO)

Look how quickly your wish has come true. Now tell me, Antonio, what do you think of these sisters?

ANTONIO

I don't know which one my soul is more drawn to. Doña Madalena is beautiful, but doña Serafina is the very sun of Portugal. Through my eyes, my soul drinks flames of love mixed with snow from the crystal glass of her pale divinity. Rumor has come up short in her praise.

DUKE

Come here, Madalena.

ANTONIO

She is a phoenix of beauty.

DUKE (to MADALENA)

There is something I wish to say to you.

COUNT (to SERAFINA)

Since the Duke gives me leave, my seraphic angel, I wish to speak to you, if there is courage in me that I may fly high enough to reach the seraph's height.

ANTONIO

I can feel my soul flying out through my eyes, the better to witness the assault that love is making on it. Even if I lost that battle, I would still count myself victorious.

JUANA

You came with your wits about you, but I'm afraid you'll be leaving them behind.

DUKE

My daughter, the King honors you with his esteem. Consider how fortunate you are.

MADALENA

My will is like wax. Your Grace may impress on it whatever seal most suits you, for my part must be only that of quiet obedience.

DUKE

A thousand times blessed is the father who hears such words.

COUNT (to SERAFINA)

You've raised my happiness to such heights, I'm afraid it may fall.

SERAFINA

I neither understand these philosophies, sir, nor are they to my taste.

COUNT

A seraph can easily grasp the heart and soul of the matter. Do not say that you don't understand, my seraphic Serafina, what you know perfectly well.

SERAFINA

My Lord, how you talk!

COUNT

I'm a man, what do you expect? God means us men to convey our intents with words, for if we were all seraphs like you, we would communicate by our thoughts alone.

SERAFINA

Is love always so talkative?

COUNT

Should it not speak?

SERAFINA

I'd never trust a little squirt like Cupid, particularly a talkative one.

COUNT

Heaven, with a free hand, has made you perfect in every way.

ANTONIO

For one so pale, she's remarkably discreet. Did you hear how cleverly she answered the Count? Now the heavens have enameled the gold of my love with jealousy. I don't think I particularly like that Count.

JUANA

You don't have much hope against a rival like him.

DUKE

I'm in need of a new secretary I can trust. Many have applied but few understand what the position requires. It will cost me a great deal of work to be without a secretary at a time like this.

MADALENA

The last one was terribly clever, if only he had been loyal.

(The posse enters, with MIRENO and
TARSO in tow.)

DORISTO

Make him walk faster!

LARISO

Look, here's the Duke.

TARSO

Herod give me patience.

DENIO (to DORISTO)

Go talk to 'em, since you's the mayor and all.

DORISTO

Afternoon, old man. I'm the mayor, and, umm, you're the Duke.

LARISO

Closer!

DORISTO

Well, you see, we knew, me and the blacksmith, and his wife, as how you wanted these scoundrels arrested, so we went: me, and Bras Llorente, and Gil Bragado... And then we talked with the constable, Pero Mínguez...

(to LARISO)

Come here and say the rest. You can talk, you're not an animal.

LARISO

I don't want to. You say it.

DORISTO

I didn't plan past this part. Well, in collusion, them two here is your thieves, which me and Gil Mingollo caught, just so's to serve you. And now, you should do what the village asks you to, Your Dukeness, and don't forget what I said about the chopping block.

DUKE

What simplicity! I don't know what they're getting at, nor for what crime they have taken these poor men prisoner. Release these men, and tell me yourselves what offense you have committed that they have brought you here like this.

(TARSO and MIRENO are freed.)

MIRENO (kneeling)

If it is an offense to have assisted an unfortunate man chased and hunted by your people, and if you consider it brash to have swapped clothes with him in order to save his life, then I am guilty.

DUKE

You helped my secretary to escape? Yes, I see that you're wearing his clothes. Tell me, traitor, why you did him this favor.

MIRENO

Do not insult me, Your Grace, or call me by that name. I am not used to being treated with such contempt.

DUKE

Who are you?

MIRENO

I am not yet—but I will be. In attempting to be more than I was born with, I have disdained that which I was and now look toward that which I am yet to be.

DUKE

I have no idea what that means.

MADALENA (aside)

What incredible audacity! He must have some strong stuff in him to be so fearless. I hate to see him in such straits.

DUKE

Tell me, did you know the traitor you helped? You must have, to have put yourself at such great risk for his sake.

MIRENO

I knew that he wanted to kill the man who had dishonored his sister, and that he had advised you of his honorable intent. When you, who should have favored him, ordered him arrested, I freed him, appalled that you would pursue him while favoring the man who compromised his honor.

COUNT (aside)

What's this? Has the secret of what I did to Leonela already been spilled?

DUKE

Do you know who has disgraced this woman?

MIRENO

If only I did, Your Grace. If I knew...

DUKE

This was clearly some trick of his to deceive you. You know where he is, so tell me, if you wish to go free.

MIRENO

Heaven forbid, even if I did know where he was, that a man like me should be frightened into committing such depravity!

DUKE

Is it depravity, then, to reveal a traitor? Take him prisoner. Unless he has lost his senses and his will to live, he'll reveal where the secretary is hiding.

MADALENA (aside)

I already wish that I could free him. His demeanor tells me he doesn't deserve such treatment.

DUKE

I fully intend to avenge you, Count.

COUNT

He'll confess.

TARSO

I'd better get a healthy reward for all this!

DUKE

Let's be on our way—I wish to reply to the King.

TARSO

What a great improvement in our fortunes all this changing of clothes and names has brought about!

(The posse bustles TARSO and MIRENO offstage.)

DUKE (to DORISTO)

Submit a request to my council for whatever you desire as a reward, and they shall pay you for your services.

DORISTO

Sir, in return for all what we've done, I'd like it if you was to put up an executioner's block in my village, the kind where we can chop the heads off all the finest men.

(The DUKE, COUNT and DORISTO exit.)

MADALENA

Serafina, I hate to see that man taken off like a prisoner.

SERAFINA

I admit, his noble demeanor tempts me to intercede on his behalf.

MADALENA

You think he cuts a handsome figure, do you? Well you won't be able to free him even if you try.

SERAFINA

So you think.

(MADALENA and SERAFINA exit.)

JUANA

Do you have to go right this afternoon?

ANTONIO

How could I, when I'm lost and blinded, when brave love and cowardly love have plundered my soul and will? If only to see her beauty one more time, I'll stay the night.

JUANA

Would you look at that! You're in love, aren't you?

ANTONIO

I fear, dear cousin, that Serafina's spell spells the end of all my life and happiness.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT I)

Act IIScene 1

SETTING: MADALENA'S chamber.

AT RISE: MADALENA is alone.

MADALENA

Oh proud conceit, what foundationless towers have you erected in the air? Crazed imaginations, how can you be so changed? Do you wish to expose my few failings to the judgment of gossips and the opinions of wags? Yesterday the heavens could allay your wild hopes with agreeable ease, but now that very tranquility is disturbed by sleepless nights. I said yes to the Count of Vasconcelos, or rather to my father, in his name, but now a man has entered my heart through my eyes, and my honor, though it saw him full well, gave in. This would be a grievous fault, did I not know that love is a blind and senseless boy. Oh my heart, must you give yourself, in spite of me, to a man both strange and a prisoner? Is it not just to love the Count? Oh, but love always rides roughshod over the laws of reason. However, since, thanks to my insistence, my father has now set him free, I may begin to recover. He is a stranger, and once he goes, time and absence, those expert doctors of love, will quickly heal my disconcerted mind. But why do I propose so severe a remedy? If the wound may be healed, it is cruelty to amputate the arm. Let us give love some place, then, since I do enjoy the sight of him. No one would deny a sip of water to a sick man, even if his is a mere passing fever. I'll call for him.

(calling out)

Doña Juana! Now restrain yourselves, you unbridled desires, lest you overwhelm me entirely. Do you wish to make public your affront? Shame conquers my mad desire, for, if it is madness to admit it into my soul, to speak it aloud is just as mad, and shameful too.

(JUANA enters.)

JUANA

That handsome young man who was a prisoner and who has now, thanks to you, been set free, wants to speak to you.

MADALENA (aside)

How quickly love takes the opportunity to bring itself into effect! But I suppose that's prudent, since love itself is made of opportunities.

(to JUANA)

Do you know what he wants?

JUANA

He wants to thank you for the favor you did him.

MADALENA (aside)

He comes selling roses, but with asps buried inside.

JUANA

Should I let him in?

MADALENA (aside)

When he was captive he captivated me, when he was mistreated he mistreated me, when his hands were tied he tied the hands of my affection. If he could kill while absent and a prisoner, what will he do present and free?

(to JUANA)

Tell him to come back in the afternoon; I'm busy now. No, wait; tell him not to come back.

JUANA

I'll go tell him.

MADALENA

Listen: tell him to wait. But... no, he should go, it's getting late.

JUANA

Should he come back?

MADALENA

Didn't I say he should? Now go.

JUANA

As you wish.

MADALENA

Wait, come back. I don't want him to complain.

JUANA

Well, what should I say?

MADALENA

Tell him to leave

(aside)

...and to take me with him.

(to JUANA)

Go on, tell him to come in...

JUANA

I suppose I'll go then.

(JUANA exits.)

MADALENA

Let him come to me; the strength of my Portuguese courage will carry the day. The wish to see with one's own eyes is a natural desire in an honorable woman as much as in a dishonorable one—the difference is that the honorable woman keeps quiet about it. I'll keep quiet then, and try to hide my disquiet, if a fire can be smothered without smoke. I'll just take up the time with idle words. But I know that if I close the door on the flames of love, they'll just escape through the windows. If I close them up in my mouth, they'll pour out my eyes, but no one will recognize them if I can hold my tongue. As long as it is only my eyes talking, I will not invite any forwardness.

(MIRENO, dressed as a courtier, enters
and kneels.)

MIRENO

Although I have been forward in entering Your Grace's presence, my lady, my wish is to thank you for the favor you have granted me, since the greatest sin is that of ingratitude. I was imprisoned for helping save the life of an unlucky man, but now heaven has repaid me in the same coin. Thanks to your help, my lady, I am now free as well. But did I say free? I misspoke, for once a nobleman has received a favor, he is obliged, that is to say enslaved, to his benefactor. If only by becoming your slave I could repay my debt to you. Yet my humility is nothing compared to so many who come to offer you their necks, so let me do the same. So great is my debt, my lady, that only my life is great enough forfeit to make recompense.

MADALENA

Please, rise.

MIRENO

I would rather remain here, my lady.

MADALENA

Do what I say.

(MIRENO rises.)

Are you Portuguese?

MIRENO

I imagine so.

MADALENA

You imagine? Do you mean that you do not know who you are?

MIRENO

My father brought me to the village where he lives when I was young, and he has the title to some land. But his manner does him more credit than his station. I believe we were born in Portugal.

MADALENA

Are you of noble blood?

MIRENO

I believe so, to judge by my honorable bearing, which proves there's more to me than you'd think.

MADALENA

And were it necessary, would your actions prove your nobility?

MIRENO

I believe so. I have never ceased to do so.

MADALENA

You answer "I believe so" to everything I ask. Do you think perchance I am interrogating you on articles of faith?

MIRENO

You may be, my lady, for my life's faith is that of gratitude for Your Grace's mercy. My faith is your desire.

MADALENA

Your gratitude is overwhelming.

MIRENO

I owe you my life.

MADALENA

Well then, now that you are free, what will you do?

MIRENO

I intend to go, my lady, where I can achieve renown that exceeds my highest hopes. It is this desire alone that leads me from my native country.

MADALENA

And where do you think you will be able to find such fortune?

MIRENO

In war, where by force of arms I may attain the stature to which I aspire.

MADALENA

Would it not be safer to attain it in peace?

MIRENO

How so?

MADALENA

You could win it easily if you devised a way to have my father name you his secretary. As you know, the position remains vacant.

MIRENO

My inclination was not born to serve, but aims rather higher.

MADALENA

Well if you wish to fly, feathers would certainly help.

MIRENO

How am I supposed to fly with just the one feather of my pen?

MADALENA

On the wings of favor. These will bear you into the Duke's confidence, where you may achieve a thousand impossibilities.

MIRENO

But experience teaches that keeping confidences leads to fear, and for a man like me to be fearful is not right.

MADALENA

Don Dionís, this is my will.

MIRENO

It is your will that I serve the Duke? Well then, enough said. Let it be done, my lady, as you wish, for with just one flight I have already risen to the highest heaven. If I may please you in this, I need not rise any higher. If the Duke will receive me, I will gladly be his secretary, since you, my lady, command it.

MADALENA

I wish you to advance, which is why I have done what you have seen. Since I gave you your liberty, I would hate to see you lose it in war. I will make sure you are given the post, and you will be able to stay here in our land.

MIRENO

May Heaven long preserve Your Grace.

MADALENA (aside)

Honor, flee. My cowardly love is about to burst its bonds.

(MADALENA exits.)

MIRENO

What am I to make of this? Oh thoughts of mine, that float among the clouds, what do you infer from all you've seen here? Declare yourselves, and tell me whether so much favor can arise simply from a noble inclination, or whether love may have entered into the picture. What folly! How can you be so bold? You should not even think such things, much less say them aloud. My humble state chastens my high-flying desire, but is it bold to imagine that she who made me secretary harbors some secret love? Was I not set free by her hand? Did I not see her will through the windows of her eyes? Love's taken hold. Be still, mad tongue; it's wrong to imagine that her favor comes from love and not from her natural nobility. But she wanted to know my name, my country, my rank... isn't that love? What else could have made her descend to my lowly plane? A woman's curiosity? Yes, but why would she say, "Don Dionís, this is my will," like that, if she wasn't in love? I know a low-born peasant like me can hardly aspire to such heavenly beauty, but on the other hand, since when have I ever backed down from a challenge? I'll wait and see, since time makes doubtful things certain.

(TARSO enters.)

TARSO

They've let us out of jail like Daniel out of the lion's den, and none too soon, because I don't have his patience. But the Duke's anger is like the prophet Habakkuk, warning us that the worst is yet to come, so what are we still doing here? Has Averro been any good to us? Let's not wait to find out! Oh, but of course, you want to be a gentleman. Well, by God, we came pretty close to getting ourselves dubbed, but with a whip instead of a sword.

MIRENO

Brito, my friend!

TARSO

I'm not Brito. I'm Tarso.

MIRENO

Listen, you idiot. I am now nothing less than secretary to the Duke of Averro.

TARSO

How?

MIRENO

The lady who gave us our freedom continues to shower us with favors.

TARSO

Now you're really somebody.

MIRENO

You don't even know the details yet.

TARSO

Congratulations, nonetheless. And now that you're the great man, you can grant your faithful servant the small favor of getting me out of these breeches.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 2

SETTING: Another room in the palace.

AT RISE: ANTONIO and JUANA enter together.

ANTONIO

Cousin, my love obliges me to stay—damn the King of Castile. At this point I serve only one king, my desire. I'm a bird: blind to the snare, I alight on the branch of beauty and am caught. If I try to escape, I only get more tangled up. The Count of Estremoz both serves and deserves doña Serafina, and I know that the Duke favors his intentions and has promised to make her his wife. But if I go, I'll be tortured by doubt. Only if my seraphic Serafina knew who I was and, knowing it, declared her love for me, could I depart joyful and sure of myself. But she does not know me, and knows even less of my great torment, so my only relief is to stay. Whether I go now or later to the King does not matter. My cousin, my lady, unless you wish me to waste away in exile from my beloved, do not ask me to leave Avero.

JUANA

Antonio, you know I esteem and love you as a cousin should. If I rebuke you for staying, it's only because this town is so small you're sure to be noticed.

ANTONIO

Never fear. I've found a way to do so safely and incognito. The Duke has never seen me. Now I happen to know that he is looking for an expert secretary.

JUANA

I think I know where this is going...

ANTONIO

Don't you see that, if I take up residence in the palace under that guise, I can advance my hopes, given time, chance, and most importantly, your help?

JUANA

The plot's a fantastic one, but unworthy of a man of your standing.

ANTONIO

Any standing is noble when it comes to love.

JUANA

Well then, find a way.

ANTONIO

The most important part is already done.

JUANA

How so?

ANTONIO

I've sent a note to the Duke asking him to give me the post.

JUANA

That's very clever, but I do wish you had told me.

ANTONIO

Prudence rewards. I left the note in the care of the Duke's valet, who they say is one of his favorites.

JUANA

The Duke does trust him.

ANTONIO

I have high hopes, as long as the valet remembers to keep his promise.

JUANA

Look, here comes the Duke.

(The DUKE and FIGUEREDO enter.)

DUKE

As I said, this position calls for a man who joins nobility, discretion, good manners, and a fine hand.

FIGUEREDO

I don't know about his nobility, but I can assure Your Grace that in all those other respects there is no one in Portugal better qualified to occupy the post than this man.

DUKE

Enough. Since you praise him so, let me meet him.

FIGUEREDO

I'll call for him at once. But look, here he is, right before Your Grace.

(to ANTONIO)

Come forward, sir—my lord the Duke would like to meet you.

ANTONIO

I place myself at Your Grace's feet.

DUKE

Rise. Where are you from?

ANTONIO

I was born in Lisbon, sir.

DUKE

Whom have you served?

ANTONIO

I was raised with don Antonio de Barcelo, the Count of Penela, and I bring with me letters of his, in which he favors my aspirations.

DUKE

I care deeply for don Antonio, though we have never met. But why did you not give me the letters before?

ANTONIO

I am not accustomed to obtaining through favors what I may obtain in my own right, and so I wanted meet you first, Your Grace.

DUKE (to FIGUEREDO)

I am impressed by his good form and style.

(to ANTONIO)

Very well, you are now my secretary. May your work prove your worth.

ANTONIO

I submit myself, sir, to the proof of experience.

DUKE

Doña Juana, what are Serafina and Madalena doing now?

JUANA

They were both just in the garden together, although I understand that my lady doña Madalena is somewhat out of sorts.

DUKE

What's the matter?

JUANA

She's been rather melancholy the last two days, though I don't know why.

DUKE

I know what the matter is. She's learned that I intend to give her a new state in life, and such changes are always the occasion for sorrow in a noble and honorable woman. It does not surprise me that she should fear a life of captivity. Doña Juana, please keep this man company. He comes from Lisbon and knows the Count of Penela, your cousin. I'm sure you will have much to talk about.

JUANA

Yes, my lord.

ANTONIO

I am Your Grace's most humble servant.

(The DUKE exits.)

ANTONIO

I'd say things are looking up.

JUANA

If that's what you call kowtowing to your equal, then yes they are.

ANTONIO

Well, now that I'm here at least there's a chance I can keep my jealousy of the Count of Estremoz at bay.

JUANA

Your beloved takes little notice of him, so you needn't worry. At the moment she only has eyes for a play she's rehearsing with the other girls, which she's planning to perform for her sister to celebrate Carnival tomorrow.

ANTONIO

Is she inclined to poetry, then?

JUANA

She loses her head over anything to do with it. This afternoon she's to rehearse the part with me alone in the garden, dressed as a man.

ANTONIO

And you tell me this just like that?

JUANA

Well, how would you like me to tell you?

ANTONIO

How? By asking for my life, my mind, my very soul, which I would gladly sign over to you for making me so lucky as to gaze on her in this manner. May you live more years than there are stars in the sky. May cruel time never consume the beauty you enjoy. May all your dreams come true, and the King of Portugal, madly in love with you, give you his hand, his scepter, and his life—

JUANA

Enough, before you lose your head and try to marry me off to the pope! I'm happy to do this for you. Let's go: I'll hide you among the jasmines and myrtles that hedge the flowerbeds, and there, as long as you keep quiet, you can feast on your soul's delight.

ANTONIO

Say, is there a painter in Avero?

JUANA

The Duke employs some quite famous ones. Why do you ask?

ANTONIO

I'd like to have one paint a portrait of my ravishing seraph. It would be easy enough for him to make a sketch while she's dressing.

JUANA

And if doña Serafina notices, or if the painter gives the game away?

ANTONIO

Money talks and money silences. Now, either stop holding things up or just kill me. Which will it be?

JUANA

You neither give me time to speak nor yourself time to listen, you rush me so. But very well, you'll see how great my love is for you. Now go find yourself a painter without a tongue, and pray you don't wind up aborting your plan. You lovers have such odd cravings, I'd swear you were pregnant!

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 3

SETTING: The palace garden.

AT RISE: The DUKE and MADALENA enter together.

DUKE

If you wish to please me, my dear, you're not handling it very well. I'd rather die than see you upset. Fate has given you a husband to make you happy. Now go and reply to the letter his father the Duke of Braganza sent you, and don't let me see any grief on your face, unless you want to send me to an early grave.

MADALENA

I'll try not to be sad, sir, for your sake

DUKE

You'll do fine if you just enjoy yourself

MADALENA

I'll try. And now, I'd like to ask a small favor of you, even though you've already granted me so many.

DUKE

Go ahead, on the condition that you forget all this sadness.

MADALENA

The prisoner I asked you to set free has come to me for assistance, and I feel obliged to help him rise in your favor. He is a fine looking man, and he has a superb pen.

DUKE

Tell me what he wants.

MADALENA

He would like to take up the position of secretary.

DUKE

I could have given it to him not long ago, but since not a quarter of an hour ago the position has been filled.

MADALENA

If it please Your Grace, I gave him my word, and now he's expecting some favor from me. Since you wish me to respond to my fiancé and his father, and since I'm

MADALENA (Cont.)

not very good at writing, perhaps we could keep him here to teach me. It's a great fault in a lady not to be able to respond when she receives a letter, or to write so poorly that it can't be read. If he gave me lessons, I'm sure I'd be able to write more clearly.

DUKE

Well then, let him teach you to embellish your drafts. Working will distract you from your sadness, which probably follows from your idleness and idleness is a vice. Let him be *your* secretary.

MADALENA

Let me kiss your hands.

(The COUNT enters.)

COUNT

Sir, I come before you a very happy man.

DUKE

Why is that?

COUNT

The King sends word that he approves my marriage to doña Serafina.

DUKE

That's splendid news. But I ask that you not tell Serafina until she's used to the prospect of her new state. You know how heavily the idea of marriage weighs on her at present.

COUNT

My soul, which so adores her, will endure these sufferings for her sake.

DUKE

I'll plead your case with her; you needn't worry. The Count of Vasconcelos will be here shortly, and we'll celebrate both weddings in good time. Cheer up, Madalena.

MADALENA

I'll be happy if it pleases you, sir.

(The DUKE and COUNT exit.)

They're right in calling love both sickness and madness, since like a sick man, the lover always wants what's worst for him. Honor, you've let into your house the very one who will battle you for my soul, and it seems to me that he won't be long in winning. Whoever seeks out danger shouldn't be surprised when he

MADALENA (Cont.)

stumbles across it. If Brutus' wife Portia killed herself by swallowing hot coals, what will happen to me, since I have swallowed the fire of my passions in silence? I'll tell him, not with words, but with visible signs, the invisible torments that I suffer by not speaking.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 4

SETTING: The same.

AT RISE: JUANA, ANTONIO, and a PAINTER enter together.

JUANA

Under this green myrtle here is a spot where Cupid himself would hide, where these jasmines and other shrubs will screen you like lattices.

ANTONIO

My seraph is an angel in this Paradise, but if she notices me, I'll be like Adam cast out of it.

JUANA

I'll make sure she rehearses the part over here, so that she's right in front of the painter and he can draw her more easily. She's dressing herself as a man right now, which she's been doing a lot lately. I'll go now and tell her that the garden is locked and empty.

(JUANA exits.)

ANTONIO

We're both painters, you and I, but I've already copied the portrait that enthralls and consumes me.

PAINTER

I don't understand.

ANTONIO

The mind is a canvas, or a *tabula rasa* as Aristotle calls it, on which can be painted a thousand different images.

PAINTER

Well put.

ANTONIO

Colors and shades are aspects of the object, which the eyes convey to the common sense. Here the estimation may admire objects, but these appear only as rough sketches until the mind illuminates and paints them with its own light. Once painted, the mind puts them on sale, and presents them to the will, a woman of infinitely good taste. She always loves the good, whether it be real or

ANTONIO (Cont.)

apparent—as long as she knows what she’s about. She can never love what she doesn’t know.

PAINTER

That’s what Aristotle says.

ANTONIO

She then unrolls all the paintings and buys the one she likes, choosing better in some cases than in others. She puts this one in the frame of love and, since she delights in seeing it, hangs it in memory, which is her most intimate chamber. In this same way I saw the unsurpassed beauty of my Lady Serafina, I took up the paintbrush and began to paint, my estimation completed the painting, my will bought it, and my imagination embellished it and conveyed it to my memory. Finally, seeing how well it came out, the painter wrote at the bottom, “*Amor me fecit*” – “Love made me.” Now do you see how the lover paints?

PAINTER

Well, if you already have the portrait, why do you want me to paint her for you?

ANTONIO

What I have is called a spiritual portrait. Sight is corporeal, and since I’d like to gaze on her even when I’m alone, I need you to paint me a corporeal portrait.

PAINTER

There’s no philosophy like a lover’s.

ANTONIO

I am a connoisseur in the ways of love. But listen, here comes my joy.

(They hide. SERAFINA enters, dressed in a man’s black tunic, accompanied by JUANA.)

JUANA

You’re really going through with this? You’re not embarrassed to see yourself like that?

SERAFINA

Everyone dresses up for Carnival, so why shouldn’t I? It shouldn’t surprise you that I’m drawn to men’s attire, since I can’t be one.

JUANA

You look the part so well that I could fall in love with you. So, it's going to be tonight?

SERAFINA

Yes.

JUANA

You know, I'd rather you found some other way to entertain yourself, instead of acting.

SERAFINA

There isn't another kind of entertainment that embraces so many pleasures as the theater does.

JUANA

Oh, spare me.

SERAFINA

What celebration or pastime is there that doesn't call for poetry? In the theater, don't a thousand things delight your eyes and banish your cares? Doesn't music beguile the ear and the mind delight in the conceit's twists and turns? For the happy is there not laughter? For the sad, tears? For the sharp, wit? For the fool, wisdom? For the ignorant, knowledge? Is there not war for the brave, councils for the wise, and authority for the grave? There are Moors if you want Moors. If you prefer tournaments, you can find tournaments; if bulls, they'll run bulls. Would you like to hear the epithets I've collected to describe the theater? It is a translation of life, sustenance for the discreet, a lady of understanding, a banquet for the senses, a bouquet of pleasures, the sphere of thought, an escape from the affronts of life, and a delicacy to match every purse, which starves fools but satisfies sages. Which side would you rather be on?

JUANA

Well, I'll take the side of the sages. I admit, this farce is going to be fun.

SERAFINA

What could you possibly find wrong with it?

JUANA

Only the sight of you acting on a stage.

SERAFINA

Why, if only my sister and her maids are going to see it? I can't believe you're so uptight about it.

ANTONIO

I'm bewitched by the grace with which she speaks. Please, begin drawing her at once. Oh, if only a mortal hand could capture from life the singular beauty of a seraph.

PAINTER

She's human, I can do it.

ANTONIO

What, aren't you awed by so majestic a sight?

SERAFINA

Bring me the mirror, doña Juana, so I can make up my face.

JUANA

(handing her a mirror)

If you look into it, my lady, beware that you don't fall in love with yourself.

SERAFINA

Am I that handsome like this, then?

JUANA

I'm afraid you'll be another Narcissus.

SERAFINA

Well! In that case, I'll gather up my hair, so I won't look like a woman when I take my hat off. Hold the mirror here. Why are you holding it way over there?

JUANA

So that I can block the view of a painter who's hidden in the garden.

SERAFINA

What are you talking about?

PAINTER

By God, that woman's giving us away! If the Duke finds out, we're in for it.

SERAFINA

There's a painter in the garden?

JUANA

Yes, now let him do his work.

ANTONIO

Jesus! Has she gone mad?

SERAFINA

Who would dare?

JUANA

Cupid would, my dear, who—smitten with you—has hidden in the bushes to paint your image.

ANTONIO

That's too true.

SERAFINA

You're in an odd mood this afternoon.

PAINTER

Should I paint her in women's clothing, or like she is now?

ANTONIO

Like she is now, so that the world can wonder at a seraph wandering about like that in men's clothes.

PAINTER

I'm finished with the sketch now. I can do the rest at home.

SERAFINA

I'm finished with my face now. You can take away the mirror. Is my hair all right? How do I look?

JUANA

Like another Medoro, the Moor who seduced Angelica in that old story.

SERAFINA

I'm not dressed like a Moor.

JUANA

No, but you're even more handsome.

SERAFINA

Let's go over the part, now that I'm dressed appropriately.

JUANA

What's this farce called?

SERAFINA

The Cruel Lady of Portugal.

JUANA

The poet must have had you in mind when he gave it that title.

SERAFINA

Well, I am Portuguese, but I'm not cruel.

JUANA

In matters of love, you're all but.

SERAFINA

What cruelty have you ever seen in me?

JUANA

To love no one.

SERAFINA

(putting on a cape and hat)

Say, is it cruel never to have wanted anyone?

JUANA

Isn't it?

SERAFINA

Would it be fair that, in order to be kind to others, I should be cruel to myself?

PAINTER

My god, she's a quick one.

ANTONIO

Oh, take pity on the wretch condemned to hear such a thing!

PAINTER

Be patient.

SERAFINA

Enough, let me practice. You'll see how well I act the jealous lover.

JUANA

What role are you playing?

SERAFINA

It's great. I play a prince who challenges a count to a duel over a lady they both love.

JUANA

That'll be good. Go ahead.

SERAFINA

I don't actually know what it means to be jealous, but watch and I'll make believe I do.

(acting)

Oh Count, thy impudence is in th'extreme,
 And of my patience passes o'er the bound.
 I am surprised at thee, and Celia too:
 At thee, that thou wouldst dare to speak to her;
 At her, that she would hearken to thy words.
 Moreover, since thou know'st th'advantages
 That from my higher station couldst expect,
 'Twas pure contempt in thee, her to have loved,
 And in her, to have lent thy love mad ear.
 Hark now, and do not try to satisfy
 My rage. All thy intents will be in vain
 If, lacking arms with which to fight, seekest
 To conquer me with words. Summon thy strength,
 That my suspicions may be laid to rest.
 For 'tis not proper to be jealous of
 So cowardly a man. Summon thy might,
 Thou worm, thou vile enemy – now die!

JUANA

Careful! Your quarrel isn't with me, my lady.

SERAFINA

So what do you think?

JUANA

You scared me.

SERAFINA

I really did get angry.

JUANA

If you can blow your top just like that, what would you do if you really were jealous?

ANTONIO

Have you ever seen such graceful jealousy?

SERAFINA

Now watch. This time, reassured of my lady and her love, I will tenderly ask her forgiveness for frightening her.

JUANA

Oh, that'll be good. Go on.

SERAFINA (acting)

As heaven is my witness, reachèd not
 My ire into my soul. Now, treasure dear,
 Let us be friends, and quarrel not, for I
 Myself do castigate. And let those eyes,
 Those lovely maids, return to sport with me.
 Remove that frown, my dears, for I would fain
 Take you for peasants, hooded so. Wherefore
 This cold disdain, my light, my star, my prize,
 My solace, dearest treasure, and my peace?
 Wilt not look on me? Art not satisfied?
 Why, take this dagger, then, and kill me. But
 Thou wilt not kill me, though thou may'st be wroth,
 For 'tis in me that all thy pleasure rests.
 Now let this be the end, Celia my dear,
 And do not make me cross.

(She goes to embrace JUANA.)

I dare to hold

Thee so, because I thee adore. Now do
 Not try from me to turn or pull away.

JUANA

Hold on there. You've turned from ice to candle-wax. You've never truly lived up to the Portuguese reputation for lovesickness till now.

ANTONIO

Oh, sweet heavens! If only I could whisper such things to her!

JUANA

Say, my lady, is it possible that someone who plays a lover so well can feel no love?

SERAFINA

Fortunately, I've avoided that fate until now. It has so few advantages and causes so much pain. Now, listen to this part. You'll see how well I can feign madness!

(acting)

Celia hath me forgot, and weds the Count?
 Heavens! Woman and fickleness have got
 The self-same root. What of the favors that,
 Like flow'rs, the promise held of future fruit?
 They were but almond blossoms, blasted now
 By the north wind. Now I am mad, so may
 Life end. Let life be lost, now sense is gone.
 But let us to the wedding. Since we've paid
 The cost, dear thoughts, let us be merry at
 Our own expense. They'll marry in the town
 As peasants do, for love hath brought her low.
 Then let us thither fly, oh jealousy,
 Since thou hast wings of fire. We'll soon arrive;
 E'en here can we them spy. Here come the guests;
 The drum keeps time for them to dance, and should
 We not as well? Now: *One two three, one two three...*

(She dances a few steps.)

Oh my desires, if Celia changed and did
 Not keep in place, should you not dance as well?
 Play on, old Pero Sastre, for the town
 Will pay thee well enough. They've gone inside
 To feast. And with this cloak of suffering now
 (pulling up her hood)
 I'll cover myself o'er, and sit unseen
 In this dull corner, as is my desert.
 And now they pass out hazelnuts to all,
 And toasted chickpeas. Ho, there! Here, you fools!
 I'll take a handful.—

Me, a fool? Thou liest!—

I lie? Take that!—

(She slaps herself.)

Wouldst slap me? Die, thou knave!—

Take that! What's this?—

(She draws her sword.)

'Twas nothing.—

Let's be friends.—

I'd like to be.

(She sheathes her sword.)

Now here comes old sir priest:

May many a good year this house rejoice

SERAFINA (Cont.)

With weddings.—

Father, here's a seat for you.—

Oh, no.—

Here, take this chair.—

No, I could not.—

But I insist.—

This bench is fine, but I

Won't make thee beg.—

The old man's at his ease.

Hernán Alonso, give the priest some wine;

Now let him drink.—

But oh, it tastes of brine.—

So beautiful Celia tastes of jealousy.

The time for vows is come, and all are on

Their feet: the couple at the front; the priest

There in the middle.—

Fabio, dost

Thou take the beautiful Celia as thy wife?—

I do.—

And Celia, dost thou Fabio take?—

As husband and as master.—

Oh, you dogs!

And in my presence! Hold, I am the prince.

Death to the bride and groom, the priest, the guests

And the whole town.—

Oh, he is killing us!—

Burn them, oh jealousy, with your wild flames.

Samson am I; among the Philistines

Come I to die, for none can bear the flames

Kindled by love, and by suspicion fanned.

JUANA

Serafina, get a hold of yourself! I'm not Celia, or Celio.

SERAFINA

I'm sorry, I lost control

JUANA

That was great, Serafina, well done. Your melancholy sister is sure to enjoy herself tonight.

SERAFINA

I really would like to cheer her up.

(SERAFINA and JUANA exit.)

PAINTER

They've gone.

ANTONIO

Leaving me blinded and sad.

PAINTER

So, you really want me to paint her as a man?

ANTONIO

Yes. I want a memento of what we've just witnessed. But change the suit.

PAINTER

You don't want it to be black?

ANTONIO

It would dress my hope in mourning. Better that it have the color of fresh pastures, flecked with gold. Gold for my love, and green for my envy.

PAINTER

As you wish.

ANTONIO

When will you have it for me?

PAINTER

Tomorrow at the latest.

ANTONIO

Money is no object. It's not out of stinginess that Cupid goes naked.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 5

SETTING: MADALENA'S chamber.

AT RISE: MADALENA and MIRENO enter together.

MADALENA

Starting today, you will be my secretary.

MIRENO

What have you seen in me, my lady, that you would ennoble me this way? Surely the student will teach the master.

MADALENA

Don Dionís, since my love is so great... for the Count of Vasconcelos, I would like, before he arrives, not only to have good handwriting, but to be able to write to him with words that would express the deepest stirrings of my heart. I am inexperienced in the art of love, and so you must train me in how to declare what I feel in my soul, as love commands. My love is boundless, but my words fall short. You seem to be a man of many parts, and so you must teach me to write, to declare my love to the Count.

MIRENO (aside)

So it wasn't for my sake, but to serve as a go-between for her and the Count? You see, love, you foolish child, how groundless were the fantastical towers you built, and how they come crashing down? I'm like the mule who bore the holy image on its back for the town feast day. When the passers-by made reverence, the delirious beast thought it was to him. Impatiently, he tried to throw the image off his back, until they flogged him back into place. Only then did he realize his foolish mistake. So, after everything I've put myself through, this is what her favor comes to? Enough. It's clear that I'm the ass; the image is the Count.

MADALENA (aside)

I had to shock him that way. It would have been too much to declare myself openly. *[To Mireno]* You will begin my lessons tomorrow.

MIRENO

At your service.

MADALENA

You're unhappy.

MIRENO

Me?

MADALENA

What is it?

MIRENO

Nothing.

(MADALENA trips; MIRENO gives her his hand.)

MADALENA

Oh, dear! I stumbled... My shoe turned.

MIRENO

My lady, are you hurt?

MADALENA

I don't believe so.

MIRENO

Was it forward of me to take your hand?

MADALENA

You should know, for a courtier, a proffered hand is a step toward better things.

(MADALENA exits.)

MIRENO

“The proffered hand is a step toward better things!” What could that mean? Tell me, vain thoughts, am I losing or winning here? What confusion, what suspicion is this? Tell me, for God's sake, is this not love? Or is it that I'm just the ass that bears the image of the Count of Vasconcelos. What are these better things toward which, with her hand, I may step? If she only loves the Count, what could I possibly hope for? What do I know? Tell me, hand or foot, why must you keep me up at night? Confusion, love, suspicion: am I loved? Or am I just the ass that bears the image of the Count? Her proffered hand can only mean that I must lend a hand to the passion the Count and her love inspire in her. Oh shame, suffer in silence. No more bold flights for you—it was folly that lifted my soaring ambition to the stars. I'm just the ass bearing the image of the Count.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT II)

Act IIIScene 1

SETTING: Lauro's house, a shepherd's hut.

AT RISE: LAURO enters, leaning on RUY, who is dressed as a shepherd.

LAURO

It's no use. Children inherit the misfortunes of their fathers, and in this case it's the only inheritance he's got. He was the only support of my old age.

RUY

Maybe you aren't so prudent after all. If anyone has a right to lament his fate, it's me. Heaven has taken away my honor, my country, my land and my name. You've lost a single son, and you still have good reason to hope that he'll return.

LAURO

You wouldn't say that if you knew the sorrows I've lived with all these years. I'm not from this rough country, Ruy, and these rough clothes you see me in are not my true inheritance. My name isn't Lauro, and these mountains are not my home. In fact, my noble blood has never known how to cultivate the earth. They call me don Pedro of Portugal, and I descend in a direct line from the Portuguese kings. The King don Duarte was my brother, and the man who reigns now is my nephew.

RUY

By God, you're the Duke of Coimbra! Let me kiss your feet.

LAURO

Never mind that. My brother, the King of Portugal, died in his youth. He left behind a six-year-old son, who, now a man, has tried to take away both my life and my honor, but in the mean time he left the government to me and the Queen till the prince came of age. I married the prince to my daughter, Isabel, to her great misfortune, since he neither values nor esteems her. A thousand flatterers soon surrounded the young king, and, as usual, slammed the palace doors in the face of Truth. They persuaded one of my brothers, the Duke of Braganza, that I poisoned the Queen, his mother, and showed him forged letters claiming that now I was plotting to overthrow him. He believed it, and ordered that I be stripped of my estate, and all the wealth I'd earned as regent. I was taken to a fortress where, in spite of all the tears and supplications of Isabel, my daughter and his wife, he ordered them to cut off my head. Fortunately I found out about the sentence and escaped. Eventually we took cover in these mountains, where

LAURO (Cont.)

my wife died in childbirth. She left me a handsome son, who has grown up wearing those rustic rags, dealing in sheep and pastures, turned from a duke into a shepherd. Twenty springtimes have passed since, bringing flowers in May and new flourishing to the grass and to my heartache, and still I remain as you see me here. All that would be nothing, though, if I had not lost the son who could make me forget all my troubles. Now tell me that I don't have good reason to miss the sight of him in my miserable old age.

RUY

If the world is a stage, it's remarkable how many stories like yours Father Time, that senile old man, has directed. Your Grace's troubles have made me forget my own. But I saw clear signs of hope in your son's presence: like coals over a banked fire, his smock concealed the flame of his nobility. May your son come home and your good fortune soon return to you.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 2

SETTING: A room in the palace.

AT RISE: MIRENO and TARSO enter together.

TARSO

You want more proof than what she said: “for the courtier, the proffered hand is a step toward better things”? Could a noble lady like her spell it out any more plainly? What are you waiting for? You’re too afraid of being forward. You’re the shiest, most clammed up lover I ever saw. Are you waiting for her to play the man’s part? In what species of animal is the female not celebrated, pursued, and courted with all sorts of loving signs? Try wooing her a little; anything else would break the natural order of things. Talk to her. Don’t lose such a woman and such rank to bashfulness

MIRENO

Tarso, all my doubts and fears are like a twisting labyrinth. I can’t tell whether the heavens prefer me to the Count of Vasconcelos. When I compare myself to him, I see that he is a man of rank, a cultivated gentleman, and a member of the royal house of Braganza. I, on the other hand, am a humble shepherd, the lowly branch of a poor trunk. I can’t believe that a noble woman like her could possibly prefer copper over gold. And yet what to make of all the ways she’s favored me: engaging me in friendly conversation, pausing and gazing, the riddles and roundabout ways she reveals her desires, pretending to stumble (if she was pretending), giving me her hand... All these things only encourage me. I’m on fire, Brito, caught between hope and fear, so that when I’m about to speak my mind, I can’t bring myself to do it. Fear holds me back, love pushes me on, and when I finally work up the courage to say something, shame creeps up and gags me.

TARSO

Shame? And you call yourself a man? Look at the baby, the damsel in distress. There’s no room at court for a shy courtier. If Cupid had any shame, they wouldn’t paint him naked. Don’t be afraid that you’ll offend her. Love may be blindfolded, but his mouth is perfectly free. Speak up, or I’ll do it for you. If you don’t, instead of a step to bigger things you may be taking a step to nowhere.

MIRENO

Brito, I know that a mute love makes no sense. Except that I could lose by speaking what I possess in silence. Now at least I can imagine she loves me, and my vague, crazy hopes live on. If by declaring my love, I risk disappointment and reproach, isn’t it wiser to hold my tongue and enjoy a doubtful love rather than a certain disdain?

TARSO

A wise man once said there were three places shame and fear did not belong: in the pulpit, at court, and in love. You're at court now and luck has cut a wide path for you. Don't turn back now.

MIRENO

But she tells me she loves the Count of Vasconcelos

TARSO

A roundabout way to test you. Start talking to her. Because, by God, if you lose her, we might as well pick up our pitchforks and head home.

(JUANA enters.)

JUANA

Don Dionís, my lady calls for you.

MIRENO

Coming.

TARSO

Now's your chance: open your heart, sir... and remember to speak slowly.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 3

SETTING: MADALENA'S chamber.

AT RISE: MADALENA is alone.

MADALENA

Cupid, blind god, why so fearful and shy? When did you get to be a grown man and know shame? Is it possible that you live in don Dionís, and that he calls you his god? If so, if he loves me, why does he keep it to himself? He should tell me if something's awry; it won't do for a man to say nothing. Just once, let his tongue tell me what his eyes express all too well. If his humble station holds him back, my bold liberties should have allayed any doubts. My eyes declare I adore him, but in vain. By giving him my hand, at the expense of all propriety, I paved the way as far as my honor would allow. Blind Cupid, if you're going to give me a lover, does he have to be mute? But I can't wonder at it, for love has made even me humble. Even if I spelled it out, he probably wouldn't believe me.

(JUANA enters.)

JUANA

Don Dionís is here for your lesson, my lady.

(JUANA exits.)

MADALENA

Here to give me a lesson in how to keep silent, since he seems to have no words. I can't put up with this silence any more. I'll declare my love openly, against all common sense and practice, but I'll do it so that, telling him everything, I'll leave him even more confused.

(She sits in a chair and pretends to be asleep. MIRENO enters.)

MIRENO

What is my lady's pleasure? Is it time for your lesson?

(aside)

My heart is thumping. She's quiet; she must not have seen me. She's just sitting there, with her hand on her cheek.

(to MADALENA)

My lady, it's me, don Dionís.

(aside)

Why doesn't she answer? Oh, she's asleep. Buck up, now's the time to go look at the beauty that clouds my mind. Her eyes are closed; I can approach without fear,

MIRENO (Cont.)

since she can't wound me with her arrows of love. Did the Author of nature ever make a more perfect beauty? If I could only kiss her hand. Should I? Yes. But no: it's a divine relic, and my humble mouth is unworthy to touch it. I'm a man, but I'm shaking! What is this? Courage. She *is* sleeping, isn't she?

(He approaches, then backs away.)

I should go. What if she wakes up? I'd die if she woke up and found me here. Better to lose this moment here than to lose everything. My fear conquers my love. It wouldn't look right for me to be here while she's asleep. I should go.

MADALENA

(Everything she says is as if in a dream.)

Don Dionís...

MIRENO

Did she call my name? Yes, she must be waking up. Imagine if I'd gone through with my plan! Is she awake? No, I think she may be dreaming, but she's proving my hopes right all the same. If she calls my name while she's asleep, she can't despise me when she's awake. What if she's dreaming about me? Oh God, if only I knew what she was saying!

MADALENA

Don't go away, don Dionís. Come here.

MIRENO

Her dream calls me to come. What luck! It's only right for me to obey since, even asleep, she is my master mistress. Love, speak already, and don't be shy.

MADALENA

Don Dionís, now that you've come to teach me both to write and to love the Count of Vasconcelos...

MIRENO

What?

MADALENA

...let us find out whether you know what love is, and what is jealousy. It would be a grave misfortune if I remained in the dark about it, since you can't very well teach what you don't know. Tell me, are you in love? Why are you blushing? What are you ashamed of? Answer me, and don't be afraid. Love is a natural tribute and a debt in all living things, from the angel to the brute. Since that is so, why are you so shy?

(She questions and answers, still as if asleep.)

MADALENA (Cont.)

Now tell me, are you in love? – Yes, my lady. – Thank God I can get at least one word out of you!

MIRENO

Could there be a lovelier dream? The man who can bear such witness is a thousand times blessed! Although I'm more inclined to believe I'm the dreamer here, since I'm surely not awake.

MADALENA

Have you told your lady of your love? – I have not dared to. – So she has never found out? – I don't doubt that she's seen the flame of love in my infatuated eyes, which cry out in silence. – The tongue should perform that task; otherwise it may as well be a foreign jargon. Has she not given you occasion to declare yourself? – So much so, that my shyness amazes me. – Speak, then. Any delay can only hurt your love. – I'm afraid to lose by speaking what I enjoy by keeping quiet. – That's just foolish. A wise man once compared a mute lover to a Flemish painting that's always kept rolled up. The painter won't get very far unless he shows his paintings to the public, so they can admire and buy them. The court is no place for reticence. Unroll your painting so it may be sold. No one can cure you if you won't tell them what's wrong. – Yes, my lady. But the inequality between us holds me back. – Isn't love a god? – Yes, my lady. – Well then, speak, for the laws of the god are absolute, toppling the mightiest monarchs and leveling crowns and clogs. Tell me who you love, and I'll be your go-between. – I don't dare. – Why not? Am I not fit to be your messenger? – No, but I'm afraid... Oh, god! – What if I say her name? Would you tell me if she is, by any chance... me? – My lady, yes. – Let me finish! And you are jealous of the Count of Vasconcelos, right? – It's hopeless. He is your equal, my lady, and the heir of Braganza. – Equality and likeness don't come down to whether a lover is noble, humble or poor, but to an affinity of soul and will. Make yourself clear from now on, don Dionís, I urge you. When it comes to games of love, it's better to go over than to undershoot the mark. For a long time now I've preferred you to the Count of Vasconcelos.

MIRENO (crying out)

Oh merciful heavens, what am I hearing?

MADALENA (as if waking)

Good Lord, who's here? Who let you in, don Dionís?

MIRENO

My lady...

MADALENA

What are you doing here?

MIRENO

I came to give you your lesson, my lady, but I found you asleep, so I waited here until you woke up.

MADALENA (rising)

I must have drifted off.

MIRENO

If you always dream like you did just now, my lady, I am a happy man.

MADALENA (aside)

Thank God the man finally said something!

MADALENA

Do you know what I dreamed about?

MIRENO

It wasn't hard to figure out.

MADALENA

Are you another Joseph, then?

MIRENO

No, I'm no interpreter. I just summarize.

MADALENA

Then tell me how you know what I dreamed.

MIRENO

You spoke aloud in your sleep, my lady.

MADALENA

God help me! I don't remember anything. Tell me what you heard.

MIRENO

I don't dare, my lady.

MADALENA

It must have been very bad, if you can't bring yourself to tell me.

MIRENO

Nothing worse than being in my favor.

MADALENA

I have to know. On my life, just tell me.

MIRENO

That's quite an oath. It encourages me to be bold. My lady, while you slept... I can't.

MADALENA

Enough, don Dionís, this is becoming tedious.

MIRENO

You showed openly that you favor me.

MADALENA

I did? How?

MIRENO

You recognized my jealousy, and in dreams you promised me...

MADALENA

Yes?

MIRENO

...that you prefer me to the Count of Vasconcelos. I realize this is no small favor—

MADALENA

You should not believe in dreams, don Dionís, for dreams are dreams, and nothing more.

(MADALENA exits.)

MIRENO

Now where did that come from? Just when my I get my hopes up, she piles disdain on the other side of the scale, and the needle is stuck at zero. I'll never say what I think again. Just my luck, that she who loves me in her dreams should hate me when she wakes. May my soul now temper its passion, serve better masters, and never trust dreams again, for dreams are dreams, and nothing more.

(TARSO enters.)

TARSO

Well, how did it go?

MIRENO

How do I know? If I were a compass, my needle would be stuck in the middle. I'll go back to my shame and modesty, since that's for the best.

TARSO

So, in other words, you did about as well as the three guys with only one shoe...

MIRENO

Tell me about it some other time.

TARSO

Denio, your father's shepherd, is here in *Avero*. He came into town and recognized me, and now he wants to see you. He's thrilled to find us here.

MIRENO

I do miss home. Life is so much simpler there! Here everything is confused, and deceit is everywhere. Let's go talk to Denio, but somewhere out of the way.

TARSO

Why?

MIRENO

I don't want to be found out here till I see where this whole adventure ends.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 4

SETTING: SERAFINA'S chamber.

AT RISE: SERAFINA and ANTONIO enter together.

SERAFINA

Don Antonio, your presumption offends me. To enter into my father's service under false pretenses, to deceive me and insult him, does not befit a nobleman. Did you somehow imagine that you had only to disclose your identity and I would simply give in to your pleasure?

ANTONIO

I stopped here to see my cousin and Cupid did the rest.

SERAFINA

My father has given his word to don Duarte that I am to be his wife, but even if he hadn't, or if I weren't inclined to obey him, I'd marry the Count to punish your foolishness. Leave Avero this instant, or I'll have Duarte settle this.

ANTONIO

Are you that spiteful, my lady?

SERAFINA

Leave, Count, or I shall scream.

ANTONIO

Let me explain.

SERAFINA

I swear by God, if you haven't left within the hour, I'll marry don Duarte this very night in revenge. The sight of you is an affliction. Now, sir, leave.

ANTONIO

You viper, you hide your venom in the roses of your beauty. Can you really disdain my amorous sighs? This is torture! Very well: since you exile me from the paradise of your presence, I'll leave you to Narcissus, to cry, like me, without consolation. But one last thing: if I'm to be banished from the sight of your beauty, I'll get some satisfaction by banishing this image from my breast.

(He takes the portrait from his shirt.)

Erase, my soul, the portrait love painted there, as I cast down this spiteful one here.

(He throws it on the floor.)

ANTONIO (Cont.)

Farewell, cruel one, portrait of a stone. I appeal to time, that wise doctor who heals all madness. Meanwhile, it is fitting that you lie on this floor, stone-cold and hard as you are. Stay, fire, and burn here in the snow.

(ANTONIO exits.)

SERAFINA

The madness of love! Good thing I've never put myself under the yoke of that harsh tyrant. What's that he threw on the floor, calling it spiteful and every other sort of name?

(She picks it up.)

A portrait! It's of a man, but he sort of looks like me. Actually, he looks just like me. It's like catching my own reflection. Who could this be? It doesn't look at all like Antonio. And why did he throw it at my feet? Could there be a man who looks so much like me? No. Even if there were, what could he possibly have done to make Antonio hate him so much? There's a riddle wrapped in an enigma here. His cousin Juana might know. Here she comes now.

(JUANA enters.)

JUANA

The garden's open now, my lady. A stroll among the carnations and jasmines might do you good.

SERAFINA

Doña Juana, would you look at this portrait? Have you ever seen such a resemblance in your life?

JUANA

Certainly not.

(aside)

This must be the portrait that painter made. Heaven help me if she finds out.

SERAFINA

Isn't it amazing?

JUANA

Oh yes, indeed, amazing.

SERAFINA

Your cousin, in a fit of pique because I don't love him, started to act like a madman and threw it on the floor before stomping out. I wanted to see what it

SERAFINA (Cont.)

was. Now the resemblance has upset me so much, I have to know what this is about. You know your cousin; how do you explain this?

JUANA

My lady, I'm as ignorant as I am astonished by it.

SERAFINA

You have no idea? Too bad. I'd give anything to know who it is.

JUANA

Well, in that case...

SERAFINA

What?

JUANA

Wait. If you call Antonio back and act as if you need him to do you some favor, out of his love for you...

SERAFINA

Clever! But he's probably already gone.

JUANA

I doubt it. I'll find him.

SERAFINA

Run!

JUANA (aside)

It's a cosmic punishment for the woman who thought she was above love to fall for her own image!

(JUANA exits.)

SERAFINA

Antonio didn't cast you aside in vain. If the original is as handsome as his copy here, I certainly wouldn't push him away. He's managed to win my heart where many others have failed. Don't be flattered. It's no surprise that I've had such a sudden change of heart. As they say, birds of a feather...

(JUANA and ANTONIO enter.)

JUANA (to ANTONIO)

Careful how you answer her.

ANTONIO (to JUANA)

A little white lie will do the trick.

SERAFINA

Count...

ANTONIO

My lady...

SERAFINA

You're a short-tempered man.

ANTONIO

I am Portuguese after all, but no wonder: you ordered me to leave Avero instantly. How could I not have lost my temper?

SERAFINA

You misunderstand the ways of women. A woman's anger, sir, is like a French horse: wild at first, but quick to spend itself. Time heals all wounds.

ANTONIO (to JUANA)

Don't believe a word of this.

SERAFINA

Well, now that we've made peace, Antonio, would you tell me why it is that you cast this portrait down at my feet? Whose portrait is it?

ANTONIO

I wish I could tell you the truth, my lady, but I do not dare.

SERAFINA

Why not?

ANTONIO

I fear a terrible punishment.

SERAFINA

You have nothing to fear, I promise you.

ANTONIO

To die for the sake of a friend would be a small sacrifice. Still, your presence gives me the courage to speak.

SERAFINA

Yes?

ANTONIO

I'm sure, my lady, that you know the long, sad story of the Duke of Coimbra, who governed this kingdom so well in both war and peace. He was from the same royal lineage as your father, so I'm sure you've both wept over his misfortunes.

SERAFINA

I overheard my father tell my sister once, and it has troubled me ever since. They say it's been twenty years since envy banished him from Portugal with his wife and their tender young son. I'd love to know if he's still alive, and where he lives.

ANTONIO

I'm afraid the duchess has died, but her memory lives on in her husband and unhappy son. My father was their kinsman and friend, and when they escaped from prison, he risked life and limb to offer them help. He has kept them disguised on one of his farms, where, wearing rough smocks, the two have tilled the land, watering it with their tears and harvesting only thorns in return. I grew up with the son, to whom I must say heaven granted a generous portion of qualities: discretion, good looks, and courage, to begin with. He's like the other half of my soul; the knot of friendship has made our lives like one. As it happens, about six months ago, he came to this town dressed as a shepherd, and on seeing you his heart was captivated right through his eyes. Since then, the whole valley echoes with the declaration that Serafina is to blame. A thousand times he's been determined to tell you of his misfortunes, but fear has held him back, knowing that the King has proclaimed him and his father traitors. I feel the unending tears he cries over you as my own, and so I promised him one day to declare his love to you, and to bring his portrait for you to see. When I arrived and heard how disdainful you were, and how you were by no means inclined to the bridle of love, I didn't dare declare the story of his lovesick pains openly until I was able to speak to you privately. That's why I persuaded my cousin to find me a position with the Duke. I soon learned that he wanted to marry you to don Duarte, and so, to head that off, I showed you the flames of my feigned love. When you responded with such fury, I threw down the portrait so that you would gaze on it and your heart soften. I knew that the beauty of his face would soon defeat your arrogant vanity. In short, beautiful Serafina, the owner of this portrait is don Dionís of Coimbra.

SERAFINA

Antonio, is this true?

ANTONIO

So true that, if he were nearby and knew that you loved him, I think he would lay his soul at your feet, even at risk to his life.

SERAFINA

If that's really so, I'm not sure there's room in my heart for don Duarte. My God, this is the son of don Pedro! Would it be possible to see him?

ANTONIO

This very night. If you agree to bring his woes to an end and speak to him in the garden, he'll be waiting.

SERAFINA

Antonio, it would be rank ingratitude to fail to love so noble a man, equal to my rank, and who returns my love. You have been discreet in all of this. I trust you to keep my secret, and arrange it so that we may speak. Now farewell.

ANTONIO

You're going?

SERAFINA

I've already said too much.

(SERAFINA exits.)

JUANA

Is it true that don Pedro and his son are still alive?

ANTONIO

Hush. I only said that because I thought the lie would buy me time. I don't know anything about the Duke, or where he took his wife and his son. *I'll* be don Dionís tonight, and Antonio by day, and that way, with a little help from Cupid, my labors will get me what I want.

JUANA

Just be careful.

ANTONIO

Love has ordained my happiness under another name, since for my own part I'm not worth anything.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 5

SETTING: MADALENA'S chamber.

AT RISE: The DUKE and MADALENA enter together.

DUKE

I'd like to see you at your lesson. I saw the address on the envelope of the letter you wrote to the Count of Vasconcelos yesterday, and I was impressed. You're writing very clearly now.

MADALENA

Apparently it's still not clear enough for my teacher don Dionís to understand.

(MIRENO enters.)

MIRENO

Did you call, my lady?

MADALENA

Yes. My lord the Duke would like to see how much better I'm writing. You know what a great writer I am now, right?

MIRENO

Yes, my lady.

MADALENA

Why, not a quarter of an hour ago, I wrote out a letter half asleep that was so clear, even someone who couldn't read would understand it. Do I make myself understood, don Dionís?

MIRENO

Quite.

MADALENA

Perhaps you could come up with some words to say in its favor.

MIRENO

My silence is praise itself. My only quibble is with the last line. There may have been something amiss with the pen, but it's very hard to read.

MADALENA

You mean the blot at the end.

MIRENO

Well... yes.

MADALENA

I made it on purpose.

MIRENO

I can only speak of the blot, since it overshadows everything else.

MADALENA

Well, a blot is easy enough to remedy. A little blot is hardly a big problem.

MIRENO

How so?

MADALENA

Carve me a quill.

MIRENO

It'll be ready shortly, my lady.

MADALENA (upset)

Get on with it. You really do fall short. You can presume all you like, but the shame is that you aren't really of much use.

DUKE

Really, I'm quite satisfied with your writing.

MADALENA

It's a pity he fails to grasp the point of the matter, deaf to hints no matter the pointers he's given. Oh, hand it over, for God's sake.

DUKE

Madalena, contain yourself.

MIRENO

Would you like the nib carved short?

MADALENA

Why do you want everything short? I want it long. Now carve it that way, or don't bother.

MIRENO

I'm carving it now, my lady.

DUKE (to MADALENA)
You're being awfully rude!

MADALENA
Shy, short men are infuriating.

MIRENO
Here, in short, is your pen.

MADALENA
Let's see.
(She examines the quill and throws it on
the floor.)
Good God, that's not it!

DUKE
Why did you throw it on the floor?

MADALENA
You're always giving them to me with hair on them. God save me from you. You should know how to wield a knife. I'm not sure what to make of you, always leaving hair on a quill so no one can read what's written.

(The COUNT enters.)

COUNT
Your Grace, I bring word from the Count of Vasconcelos. He is only a day's journey away.

MADALENA
Oh!

COUNT
He'll arrive by tomorrow. But his leave from the King is so brief, he'll have to be married and return immediately. If Your Grace will make the necessary preparations, I'll go now to meet him.

DUKE
Did he not write me?

COUNT
He sent this note.

DUKE

My dear daughter, the moment we've been awaiting has arrived. Set this aside and make ready: you'll be married tomorrow.

(The DUKE and COUNT exit; Madalena starts to write.)

MADALENA

Don Dionís, once I have finished writing this note, read what it says, and do what I tell you.

MIRENO

If I have no chance now, what's the point?

MADALENA

Love is nothing but chance.

(MADALENA exits.)

MIRENO (reading)

"Time is short. Tonight in the garden there'll be an end to the fears of the shy courtier." Tonight? What luck! Am I dreaming? Am I mad? It can't be. "Tonight in the garden..." My God, it's written right here! I have to find Brito. Could there be a happier ending? Soon, among the flowers, the shy courtier will make the Count of Vasconcelos writhe with jealousy.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 6

SETTING: LAURO'S house.

AT RISE: LAURO, RUY, MELISA and VASCO enter together.

LAURO

Is it true? My son is in Averro? My cousin is secretary to the Duke? How times change! But what am I waiting for? Let's go see them—

RUY

And what if they recognize me?

LAURO

Blacken your face like a coalminer. I'll have a good day tomorrow in Averro, even in my old age. I feel alive again.

(to VASCO)

You stay here and look after the house.

(LAURO and RUY exit.)

MELISA

Let Beelzebub look after the house. But Vasco, is there any news of Tarso?

VASCO

From what I've heard, he doesn't give a damn about you. And he's not Tarso anymore, either.

MELISA

Who is he?

VASCO

Brito.

MELISA

Cruel Tarso, my enemy, my tyrant, I'll just have to go and put some sense into you.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 7

SETTING: The palace garden at night.

AT RISE: SERAFINA and JUANA are at the window.

SERAFINA

Juana! There's no backing out of this. If I delay, the Duke will marry me off tomorrow.

JUANA

Don't be afraid, my lady. My cousin's gone for him, and he should bring him back any minute.

(ANTONIO enters, cloaked.)

ANTONIO

Cupid, tonight your mystical powers have made me into a fake don Dionís and a real don Antonio. I'll have to speak for both of them. I see people in the window.

SERAFINA

I hear something—my hope wasn't in vain.

(TARSO enters, cloaked.)

SERAFINA

Hello there, is that Antonio?

ANTONIO

Yes, my lady.

SERAFINA

Is don Dionís with you?

TARSO (aside)

What? Don Dionís? That's a good one. But is that doña Madalena? Mireno told me to tell him if there were people here, but it looks like someone else is trying to take his place. But what if it *is* don Dionís?

ANTONIO

I bring with me a don Dionís whose soul you already own, but who comes to lay the rest of himself at your feet. Now speak, don Dionís. What are you waiting for?

ANTONIO (Cont.)

(changing his voice to speak as don
Dionís)

Can't you see I'm speechless, contemplating such glorious visions as I see here?
To pay the great debt I owe you, my lady, with words would be a disgrace, and so
I do not dare to try, but rather rein in my tongue. Since love is a god, he will pay
my debt for me.

JUANA (aside)

He's good at disguising his voice!

SERAFINA

Can you not pay me on credit, sir?

ANTONIO

I don't know, but I can offer you a good backer. Don Antonio will give me credit,
won't you?

(as himself)

Oh, most assuredly.

TARSO (aside)

Devil take me! It's only one man, by God, but he sounds like two.

ANTONIO (as don Dionís)

I am in great danger speaking to you here. I beg you, make my happiness certain
and bring my pains to an end.

SERAFINA

What would you have me do?

JUANA

Remember, my lady, that if you dally till daybreak you'll be married to don Duarte
whether you like it or not. You can't afford to wait.

SERAFINA

Oh, what should I do?

JUANA

A fine time for cold feet! Do we let him in?

SERAFINA

Do as you wish.

ANTONIO

(as himself, then alternating voices)

Don Dionís, love has brought you the greatest luck. Use it well. – I'm your friend and slave for life! – I'll wait for you here, as I would for any friend. Go on. – Farewell, Antonio.

(ANTONIO goes in.)

SERAFINA

Has he come in?

JUANA

Yes.

SERAFINA

I can't believe I've given in to love! Well, at least it's not the love of don Duarte; that should count for something. If only my father can forgive me.

JUANA

It's time, dear.

(SERAFINA and JUANA exit.)

TARSO

I can't make heads or tails of this. A don Antonio who talks to himself, says he's going to stay put, and then walks right in. I swear he must be the devil himself!

(MIRENO enters, cloaked.)

MIRENO

He must have fallen asleep, as usual.

TARSO

Someone's already come and taken your place here, sir.

MIRENO

You idiot, what are you talking about? I sent you to see if there were people, and you've just been standing here!

TARSO

There *were* people.

MIRENO

Who?

TARSO

One don Antonio, and one don Dionís—one person who seemed like two.

MIRENO

Are you out of your mind?

TARSO

I'm telling you, by God, a man just walked in to meet your doña Madalena, and he's either a trilingual scholar, or he can be in two places at once, or he's your ghost. I swear, he knows more than twenty Ulysses. Either some traitor's outwitted you, or I dreamed the whole thing, or there are two don Dioníses around here.

MIRENO

You must have dreamed it.

TARSO

Right!

(MADALENA comes to the window.)

There's someone in the window.

MADALENA

Oh dear, I hear people! Hello there, is that don Dionís?

MIRENO

My lady, I am the lucky one.

MADALENA

Come, my shy one.

(MADALENA exits.)

MIRENO

Now do you believe that you dreamed it?

TARSO

I don't know what to say.

MIRENO

If my shyness was a shame, then farewell shame.

(MIRENO goes in.)

TARSO

I can't figure it out. There are two Don Dionises in that house. I must be under a spell!

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 8

SETTING: The palace garden, the next morning.

AT RISE: LAURO and RUY enter together.

LAURO

Can you believe it, Ruy, that we're back in Averro?

RUY

I was rich here not long ago, and now I return as a poor shepherd.

LAURO

What a magnificent palace the Duke has!

(Drum-roll. MELISA and VASCO enter.)

RUY

A drum-roll this early in the morning?

LAURO

What could that be about?

RUY

Look, the Duke! Something big is about to happen.

LAURO

It looks like he's about to issue a proclamation.

(The DUKE, COUNT and FIGUEREDO enter.)

DUKE

Don Duarte, no other news could make me happier. My cousin don Pedro's troubles are through, provided he's alive.

LAURO

Good heavens, what did he just say? Am I the cousin he means? I can't believe it.

DUKE

Before you go to meet my other son-in-law, I want you to hear what the King has decreed.

(to FIGUEREDO)

Read the proclamation.

FIGUEREDO

“Our lord King Alfonso the Fifth commands that the innocence of the Duke don Pedro of Coimbra, and the treason of his accuser, Gabriel Fernández, be solemnly proclaimed throughout his royal domains. The King reinvests his noble vassal don Pedro with all his estates. Wherever he resides, if he be alive, he is to be treated with the respect due to the King himself. Furthermore, the King names don Pedro’s sons heirs of his estate, and declares Gabriel Fernández and his sons traitors in perpetuity, commanding that salt be scattered in their homes, as has been the custom in this kingdom since the time of the Visigoths. Let this be proclaimed, that all may know of it.”

VASCO

Well *that’s* a long speech!

MELISA

There’s a fine set of vocal chords on that one!

LAURO

Thanks be to Your mercy, wise and righteous Judge, who has brought justice for me.

RUY

I’d like to congratulate you, sir, through my tears.

DUKE

Who are those peasants making such a commotion over there?

COUNT

Hello there, good people! The Duke is calling you.

LAURO

Troubles, if you’ve kept me silent till now, now’s the time to speak. What am I waiting for? Give me those noble arms of yours, Your Grace, my dear cousin. I am don Pedro.

DUKE

Good heavens!

COUNT

Noble Duke! In such clothes?

LAURO

In these clothes I have preserved my life and my honor until now.

MELISA

Did my master just say he's a duke?

DUKE

I've given my word to the Count of Estremoz to marry him to my younger daughter, and just now I'm waiting for the Count of Vasconcelos to come and marry my eldest.

LAURO

You're a wise man, to choose such fine sons-in-law.

DUKE

And even more fortunate that you're here to be their sponsor. Now where are my daughters? They should know what has happened, since it concerns them, too.

(MADALENA, SERAFINA and JUANA
enter.)

MADALENA

Your Grace, what's going on?

DUKE

Come, daughter, and kiss the hands of the great Duke of Coimbra.

MADALENA

What a surprise!

LAURO

I can hardly believe it.

SERAFINA (aside)

What luck! Now I'm sure to enjoy my don Dionís, since fate has restored his birthright.

LAURO

May you enjoy a long, happy life with the husbands who await you.

MADALENA

May the fates allow you to defeat all your enemies, and see your grandsons on the throne. But if you value my life at all, I beg you to prevent my marriage.

DUKE

What?

MADALENA

Although the modesty of womanly decorum should seal my lips, I must tell you:
I'm already married.

DUKE

You brazen girl, have you lost your mind?

MADALENA

Heaven and my love have given me a husband and, while he is humble and poor,
he is also discreet, brave, and a gentleman.

DUKE

What are you saying?

MADALENA

The secretary you gave me to be my teacher is now my husband.

DUKE

Enough! You would scorn the Count of Vasconcelos for a low-born man like
him?

MADALENA

My love, which knows how to humble the mighty and raise up the lowly, has
made him my equal.

DUKE

I'll kill you...

LAURO

Wait a minute. Your son-in-law is my son.

DUKE

What do you mean?

LAURO

Your daughter's secretary is my son Mireno, whom I now christen don Dionís,
my heir.

DUKE

Well... that's a different story. What was an affront is now a blessing.

MADALENA

He's your son? Oh dear God! I should be kissing Your Grace's feet.

SERAFINA

Not so fast—there's some trick here. Don Dionís, son of the Duke of Coimbra, has given me his hand and his word as my husband.

DUKE

What did I do to deserve this?

SERAFINA

Doña Juana is my witness.

MADALENA

But don Dionís is in my chamber right now.

SERAFINA

That's impossible! I left him in *my* chamber.

LAURO

I only have one son.

DUKE

Bring them here immediately.

(FIGUEREDO exits.)

Is there no end to this nightmare?

MELISA

Where's this all going, Vasco?

VASCO

Your guess is as good as mine. I don't know if I'm dreaming or awake.

MELISA

Oh no, what if Tarso comes out?

(MIRENO enters.)

MIRENO

Father, I kneel before your feet. But I'm confused—what's going on?

LAURO

My son, give me your arms, and give new life to these old gray hairs of mine. This is don Dionís.

SERAFINA

Cruel fate, what trickery is this?

DUKE

Embrace me, too. I have found in you the noblest heir in all of Portugal.

LAURO

Why do you look so confused, my son? The crude name of Mireno is yours no longer, and neither am I Lauro. I am once again the Duke of Coimbra, now that the King has recognized my innocence.

MIRENO

How can this be? Thank God! What luck!

(ANTONIO and FIGUEREDO enter.)

ANTONIO

I kneel before you, Your Grace.

DUKE

What are you doing here, secretary?

SERAFINA

Antonio, where is my husband, don Dionís?

ANTONIO

I have deceived you, my lady. Last night in his name I enjoyed the greatest beauty and the greatest gift that love has to offer.

DUKE

You villain!

SERAFINA and COUNT

Kill him!

JUANA

Wait! This is my cousin, the Count of Penela.

ANTONIO

Your Grace, my lord, I humbly beg your pardon.

COUNT

This is heaven's doing, for Leonela's sake. I gave her my hand and my word as her husband, but I abandoned her once I'd had my pleasure.

LAURO

And here is her brother, who tried to avenge her, albeit unjustly, and has been punished with the lowly life of a shepherd. If I may intercede for him, Your Grace, I beg you to be merciful.

DUKE

Enough—the Duke commands it.

SERAFINA

Oh! The portrait was of me, wasn't it?

DUKE

Don Antonio, give Serafina your hand. The Count of Vasconcelos has lost his chance, and I am under no obligation to him.

(to MIRENO)

And you, you've taught my daughter well. Were you the quiet, shy one, then? But who could be shy at the court?

(TARSO enters.)

TARSO

Duke Mireno? What am I hearing? Don Dionís, I kneel before you. And in celebration of your wife, and your Dukedom, I beg that you free me from these breeches.

MELISA

Traitor! Fickle! Spiteful! Now you'll pay for the love, the pains, and the tears you owe me. Sir Duke, I'm begging you on my knees to marry us.

TARSO

Is he a priest, too?

MELISA

Order him to love me.

MIRENO

I order it. And I'll throw in three thousand *cruzados* for him, too.

TARSO

Is that a reward, or is it a pay-off?

MIRENO

And I'll make him my valet, so I can keep him by my side.

DUKE

Now it's time to receive the Count of Vasconcelos. He'll be disappointed in love, but perhaps we'll be able to lighten his heart with this strange story of *The Shy Courtier*.

THE END