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# The hidden spring

Roberto Bracco,  
Oscar Wilde







# Poet Lore

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## THE HIDDEN SPRING

*A Drama in Four Acts*

BY ROBERTO BRACCO

*Translated by Dirce`St. Cyr*

### CHARACTERS

STEPHEN  
THERESA  
VALENTINE  
THE PRINCESS MERALDA HELLER  
AN OLD BEGGAR  
DON FAUSTO  
ROMOLO (a servant)

*The scene is laid in Naples, at the present time*

### ACT I

*The Park of Posilipo. On the right is Stephen Baldi's little villa. The architecture is simple but in very good taste. The one door leading into the villa is closed. In front of the door a step and a veranda without a balustrade. Above the door, three small windows. On the window-sill of one of them, a vase with roses. The principal entrance of the villa is supposed to be on the opposite side. On the left, trees and rose bushes. Up stage, a drive and as background a wall and view of the sea. On the veranda, rockers and chairs. In the garden, a bench. In the distance on the left, one can see Vesuvius. The sun gives a striking light to the scene. The air is full of gaiety.*

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## THE HIDDEN SPRING

## SCENE I

THERESA, VALENTINE, ROMOLO

(*Valentine, a man about forty, hunchback, and with irregular features, is standing at the window, trying to revive some roses, which are in a vase, out on the window-sill. Romolo, a typical Italian servant, is standing in the garden, holding by the collar a coat, which Theresa is carefully brushing. The latter is a woman about twenty-five, very sweet and simple in her manners.*)

*Theresa.*— We are better out here. It is better not to get more dust in the house.

*Valentine.*— I say Madame Theresa, what are you doing there?

*Theresa.*— Can you not see? I am brushing Stephen's clothes. Hold it up, Romolo.

*Valentine.*— It seems to me that Romolo should brush his master's clothes.

*Romolo.*— Madame does not want me to do it.

*Valentine.*— It is because you are not obliging! Of course a servant whose name is Romolo, cannot humiliate himself to brush the clothes of a master, whose name is simply 'Stephen.' But don't forget, your master is not an ordinary Stephen!—

*Romolo (grumbling).*— Go on, go on!

*Theresa (reprimanding him).*— Romolo!

*Valentine (takes the roses out of the vase, changes the water and puts them back, one by one).*— They don't last very long, these roses, Madame Theresa. They are already beginning to wither.

*Theresa.*— You gathered them two days ago.

*Valentine.*— Two days is too short a time!

*Theresa (putting the folded coat on a chair, to Romolo).*— Now the waistcoat.

*Romolo (taking the waistcoat from a chair and giving it to Theresa).*

*Theresa (going on brushing the clothes.)*

*Valentine.*— Sometimes, you are able to keep your roses fresh for a week.

*Theresa.*— Why do you keep them in your room during the night?

*Valentine.*— I like to sleep in the midst of the perfume, Madame Theresa!

*Theresa.*— And that hurts you and the roses (*folding the waistcoat*).

*Valentine.*— In other words, they injure me, and I them.

*Theresa.*— That's it, Valentine (*giving all the clothes to Romolo*). Take everything inside.

*Romolo (going towards the door, which is closed).*

*Theresa.*— Where are you going, Romolo? Did I not tell you always to go out and in by the back door? You must never go to your master's study, unless you are called. Don't forget again.

*Romolo.*— I have been here only ten days, and no one has ever told me that.

*Valentine.*— I told you of it. I, who consider myself your immediate superior.

*Romolo (shrugging his shoulders, exit behind the house).*

*Valentine.*— What shall I do, Madame Theresa, everybody laughs at me.

*Theresa.*— Not I, though.

*Valentine.*— But you are different from all the others.

*Theresa (laughing).*— Ah! ah! (*picking up her work basket, takes out all the necessary things for sewing*).

(*A silence.*)

*Valentine (still at the window, lights his pipe; then, as if seeing someone coming from the road).*— I say, whom are you looking for?

*Theresa.*— If it is someone who wants to see Stephen, don't let him come in. It is not time yet. I'll hide myself (*taking her work basket up quickly*).

*Valentine.*— Leave him to me.

*Theresa (runs away to the back of the house).*

## SCENE II

VALENTINE, DON FAUSTO

(*Don Fausto who has not heard Valentine's call enters slowly from the alley, leaning on his cane. He is a stout, elderly man, with an air of authority*).

*Valentine (calling loudly).*— I say, Sir, Sir.

*Don Fausto (who begins to hear a little, looks around).*

*Valentine.*— Here! here! look up!

*Don Fausto (at last raises his head).*

*Valentine.*— Ah! It is you, Don Fausto. What are you doing here? Just wait a second. I'll be down in a minute. (*After a second he appears in the garden*).

*Don Fausto.*— Why, it is really you! From down here I could not see your shoulders, and I did not know who you were. I always recognize your hump better than your face.

*Valentine.*— I, on the other hand, can recognize you from every side of your body.

*Don Fausto.*— How did you come here?

*Valentine.*— I did not come here. I am always here. I am employed by Mr. Stephen Baldi. I am his secretary, his major-domo, his typewriter, his errand-boy. It is true that in reality I don't do much. But since he gives me food, shelter and tobacco and lets me have my freedom, I don't mind remaining with him (*comically*). When I was with you, you wished to pay me according to my work. Do you think a man like me would humiliate himself by becoming a book-keeper in your dirty soap-factory? Do you see that window with the roses? That's my room, and there I enjoy myself. When you came in, I looked at you and thought how superior I feel now to you.

*Don Fausto.*—I haven't heard a word of what you said. Do me the favor to speak on the left side. I can no longer hear with my right ear.

*Valentine (stepping on the left side of Don Fausto).*— How could I know you had lost one ear!

*Don Fausto.*— I am astonished! Everybody knows what has happened to me.

*Valentine.*— I did not hear of anything.

*Don Fausto.*—Yes, everybody knows it, because I wrote an article in the newspapers.

*Valentine.*— An article!

*Don Fausto.*— Yes, against that doctor, the specialist, who ruined my ear.

*Valentine.*— Indeed you always fought for your rights!

*Don Fausto.*— You're right there! I always punished all the scoundrels! But please repeat to me now, what you said before.

*Valentine.*— Never mind. The point is, I am employed by Mr. Stephen Baldi.

*Don Fausto (putting his hand on Valentine's shoulders).*— Then perhaps you are the man I am looking for. Have you any influence with this rare beast?

*Valentine.*— It is you, who are the rare beast.

*Don Fausto.*— Well, I mean this seductive poet.

*Valentine.*— Before you go on, you must withdraw the word 'seductive.'

*Don Fausto.*— All right! I'll drop the word 'seductive.'

*Valentine.*— Those who live at the expense of others also have some influence over them. Moreover I, besides living at his expense, am related to him. Yes, we come from the same tree!

*Don Fausto.*— From Adam and Eve ?

*Valentine (imitating him).*— From Adam and Eve (*caressing his chin*).  
What a nice man you are!

*Don Fausto.*— Don't touch me!

*Valentine.*— I am a cousin in the third degree. Take off your hat on that.

*Don Fausto.*— I'll do that if you can make him pay me the seventeen hundred francs he owes me.

*Valentine.*— Did Stephen buy seventeen hundred francs' worth of soap from you ?

*Don Fausto.*— What are you talking about ? I gave up my soap-factory five years ago. My brother in law, who lost his position at the museum, and I together opened a store for antiques. Did you not know that ?

*Valentine.*— Who would lose his time to speak about you ?

*Don Fausto.*— But I wrote an article in the papers about it.

*Valentine.*— What, another one ?

*Don Fausto.*— Nothing funny about it! What are the newspapers for, if not for tales.

*Valentine.*— I see you have a good opinion of newspapers.

*Don Fausto.*— Let me reach my point.

*Valentine.*— Yes, do.

*Don Fausto.*— Eight months ago your cousin in the third degree bought from me a frame and two chairs.

*Valentine.*— What! seventeen hundred francs for a frame and two chairs ?

*Don Fausto.*— Seven hundred for the frame and five hundred for each chair.

*Valentine.*— Heaven knows how many a time I've sat on those five-hundred franc chairs and never noticed the difference.

*Don Fausto.*— I wrote him more than twenty letters.

*Valentine.*— And he ?

*Don Fausto.*— He ? Exactly as if I had never written to him.

*Valentine (putting his pipe in his pocket).*— Don't be offended, he is always absent-minded.

*Don Fausto (angry).*— Absent-minded ?

*Valentine.*— You see, all the poets are absent-minded.

*Don Fausto (loudly).*— But I'll cure him!

*Valentine (petting him as one would a horse).*— Good, good Don Fausto!

*Don Fausto.*— Don't touch me.

*Valentine.*— One of these days I'll speak to him about it.

*Don Fausto.*— Now I need some cash, because I have to face the payment of some bills, which are due today. Therefore, by twelve o'clock, I must have all he owes me without fail.

*Valentine.*— It will be hard to satisfy you at twelve, because it is just the hour that Stephen is shut up in his study and cannot be disturbed.

*Don Fausto.*— Study or no study, if in an hour from now he has not paid his debt, I'll send a sheriff and—

*Valentine (quickly).*— Write an article in the newspapers?

*Don Fausto (firmly).*— Yes.

*Valentine.*— Good, and then Stephen will answer you in poetry.

*Don Fausto.*— And I, in prose, will call him a scoundrel!

*Valentine.*— How dare you?

*Don Fausto.*— You are provoking me.

### SCENE III

DON FAUSTO, VALENTINE, THERESA

*Theresa (coming from the back of the house).*— What has happened, Valentine?

*Valentine (to Fausto).*— This is his wife. Be a gentleman with her. *(To Theresa)* Nothing, Madame Theresa, nothing serious. Here is Don Fausto Cantajello, who claims seventeen hundred francs for a frame and two chairs.

*Don Fausto.*— Yes, two large armchairs of the period of Henry the Fourth.

*Valentine (to Theresa).*— Yes, he means those two big armchairs— *(makes a gesture).*

*Don Fausto.*— That's right. Henry the Fourth himself sat in those armchairs.

*Valentine.*— No doubt about it. Yes, one can still see his impression on them.

*Don Fausto.*— The frame contained the first painting of Napoleon I.

*Valentine.*— I understand now why Stephen put his —

*Theresa (on the right side of Don Fausto).*— Yes, but I don't believe that my husband can pay such a sum today; could you kindly wait a few days?

*Don Fausto (who did not quite hear, to Valentine).*— What did she say?

*Valentine.*— To the left, to the left, Madame Theresa.

*Theresa.*— To the left?

*Valentine.*— He is deaf in the right ear. Speak to him in the left one.

*Theresa* (going to the left side of *Don Fausto*).— I said kindly to wait a few days.

*Don Fausto.*— Ah no, Madame, I have already explained everything to your husband's third cousin.

*Theresa.*— Valentine.

*Valentine* (zealously).— Well?

*Theresa* (aside).— You know, Stephen does not wish you to be known as his third cousin.

*Valentine.*— It's true! I always forget it.

*Theresa* (affectionately).— We have to respect— his ideas—

*Don Fausto.*— Well, Madame, what have you decided about it?

*Theresa.*— I don't know what to say. I never disturb my husband, when he is writing, especially today. Yes, as soon as I know he has some money—

*Don Fausto.*— 'When he has some money?' My dear lady, it will be too late! Fortunately (taking the bill from his pocket) he signed this bill, therefore he will not deny it. The time is past, and I can now act at once.

*Valentine.*— Sheriff— articles in the newspapers.

*Theresa* (frightened).— Heavens! What do you say?

*Don Fausto.*— My dear lady, I reason so! Who ever can afford such a pretty villa at Posilipo, built expressly for himself, which I know has cost him a great deal and who drives in a carriage, when I always take the car—

*Valentine* (interrupting him).— It must be trying, you who are so fat.

*Don Fausto* (angry).— Yes, I who am so fat, go on foot, but I carry my head high. What surprises me is that Mr. Stephen Baldi—

*Valentine* (interrupting him).— Drives in a carriage instead with down cast eyes.

*Don Fausto.*— He should go with down cast eyes, as he never keeps his word.

*Theresa.*— Sir, you offend us!

*Don Fausto.*— I don't mean to offend anyone, but when people want to take away from me the little I have made out of my own efforts, I'll defend myself.

*Valentine.*— Did you make Napoleon's frame by—

*Don Fausto.*— Precisely.

*Valentine.*— Then of course you are right.

*Don Fausto.*— Dear Madame, you see, business is very bad at present. There is such an abundance of antiquities. Yes, people want to be in the

fashion, and I hardly make my living. If I find someone wants to play me a trick I'll play mine first, and we both die in the same water. For eight months your husband has ignored me, now it is time for me to act at once.

*Theresa (trembling).*— For pity's sake, no! Listen—listen, dear sir, I'll see what I can do.

*Don Fausto.*— I'll give you an hour.

*Theresa.*— Dear Valentine, you only can help me.

*Valentine.*— I'll do anything for you, Madame Theresa, but what can I do?

*Theresa.*— Do you know any pawn shop?

*Valentine.*— Only a few of them.

*Theresa.*— Are there any here in Posilipo?

*Valentine.*— It is here that they are most flourishing.

*Theresa.*— How much do you think I can get for these earrings, that I am wearing?

*Valentine.*— What? Would you? —

*Theresa.*— It is the only thing I have.

*Valentine.*— It is too great a sacrifice.

*Don Fausto (understanding the situation, goes up stage, so as to let them be quite free).*

*Valentine (looking at the earrings).*— I am afraid only between eleven hundred and twelve hundred —

*Theresa.*— I have a hundred and ten francs saved up.

*Valentine.*— It's not enough yet.

*Theresa.*— An idea! I'll borrow it from my aunt. Yes! yes! You'll go and ask for me. She is very fond of you, and she will not deny you.

*Valentine.*— Do you think your aunt will give the money, because she is fond of me?

*Theresa.*— She was always so good to me. She took my mother's place when I was left an orphan.

*Valentine.*— Yes, she squandered the little you had.

*Theresa.*— All for my education.

*Valentine.*— How credulous you always are —

*Theresa.*— Don't let us lose any more time. I cannot bear that man's presence. Go with the earrings first (*giving her earrings to Valentine and taking out from her bosom a roll of bills*). And here are the hundred and ten francs. I had saved them up to buy a present for Stephen.

*Don Fausto (looking at them).*

*Valentine (putting everything in his pocket).*— Let us hope I may find your aunt in a good humor.

*Theresa.*— For pity's sake, don't discourage me.

*Valentine.*— I don't discourage you, I said, only let us hope. (*Beckoning to Don Fausto*) I say, you beast, come along with me.

*Don Fausto* (*approaching him and pointing to his left ear*).— Well?

*Valentine.*— We shall pay you.

*Don Fausto.*— I am at your service (*turning to Theresa and taking off his hat to her*), Madame.

*Theresa.*— Good morning, sir.

*Valentine.*— For once the sheriff and the newspapers will have a holiday.

*Don Fausto.*— I can't swear to that yet.

*Valentine* (*taking him by the arm, and dragging him away*).— You beast! (*Both go out from the alley.*)

*Don Fausto.*— What did you say I am?

*Valentine* (*going on his left side and taking his left arm*).— A beast!

*Don Fausto.*— If you wanted to say that, you could have remained on the right side.

*Valentine.*— No, no, my dear friend; I'll remain on the left. (*Both exit.*)

*Theresa.*— Don't stay long, Valentine.

*Valentine's voice* (*from outside*).— It will take a little time.

*Theresa.*— But my aunt does not live far from here.

*Valentine's voice* (*from outside*).— I must stay on the left side, you scoundrel!

*Theresa* (*quite worried sits on the bench and begins to sew*).

## SCENE IV

THERESA, STEPHEN

(*Enter Stephen, a young man near thirty, very handsome and attractive.*)

*Stephen* (*opening the door and putting his head out*).— Theresa?

*Theresa* (*sweetly*) Stephen?

*Stephen.*— I heard some noise — some voices —

*Theresa.*— Yes! — It was Valentine who was talking with a man —

*Stephen.*— Who was it?

*Theresa.*— — A friend of his, I believe —

*Stephen.*— He should not receive his friends in my house. They always look so dirty. I'll ask you to tell him so, will you?

*Theresa.*— As you wish.

*Stephen* (*approaching Theresa and, with a certain vanity, making her smell a letter, which he holds in his hands*).

*Theresa.*— How sweet it smells!

*Stephen.*— It is a letter from the Princess Heller.

*Theresa.*— Who is the Princess Heller?

*Stephen.*— You never seem to know anything that goes on in the world. The Princess Heller is a great lady, who only a few years ago came to establish herself in Naples. Today her salon is considered the most intellectual, elegant and brilliant place in town.

*Theresa.*— How should I know it (*sewing*). You have never spoken to me about her —

*Stephen.*— I did not know her personally; I only met her yesterday at the studio of the artist Ferrantini. She calls on him.

*Theresa (without meaning).*— You met her yesterday and today she writes to you?

*Stephen.*— She invites me to frequent her salon.

*Theresa (sincerely).*— I am so glad! It will help you a lot.

*Stephen (a little provoked).*— You mean to say my presence will flatter her.

*Theresa (a little mortified).*— I said it will help you, because you need a little distraction.

*Stephen (in good humor).*— Now don't make the matter worse by excusing yourself. I am quite used to your silly every-day remarks.

*Theresa (sadly).*— You will end by becoming tired of me.

*Stephen.*— Don't fear that. Being a wife, you are all right as you are (*gently*). I always liked you just so.

*Theresa.*— Really?

*Stephen.*— Really.

*Theresa (draws herself up proudly).*

*Stephen (sitting next to her, in a loving manner).*— Tell me, dear little wife, what are you making?

*Theresa.*— Some aprons.

*Stephen.*— For the maid?

*Theresa.*— No, for myself.

*Stephen.*— For you?

*Theresa.*— Yes, because when one is busy around the house —

*Stephen.*— But I will not allow that. We have a secretary, a maid, a cook, a coachman, a man —

*Theresa.*— The more servants we have, the less we can trust them; especially the cook, who takes so much authority! For instance, this morning I went to verify the fruit he had bought for breakfast and —

*Stephen (closing her mouth with the palm of his hand).*— No, Theresa, I don't want to hear anything about the cook.

*Theresa.*— You reminded me of him. Otherwise I should never have mentioned the incident to you.

*Stephen (caressing her cheek).*— You little silly girl!

*Theresa (laughing).*— What can I do?

*Stephen.*— You do not even understand that in this moment I should like to see you stop sewing.

*Theresa.*— Immediately, dearest. (*Puts back everything in the work basket.*) But you also have been working till now, haven't you?

*Stephen.*— Yes, but there is a slight difference between my work and yours, don't you think so?

*Theresa.*— Did you work much?

*Stephen.*— Not very. I am working now at a very trying thing, which takes up all my vitality. One has to sacrifice himself so when his income is so meager. How I suffer! No, it cannot go on like this. No! no! I feel that this practical, narrow-minded way of living is killing my inspiration. I must write a poem, and I shall call it 'The Need of Strength.' I am sure it will make a sensation, as it will expose all the struggling ones, all the weaker minds, all the cowards, the useless beings, the silly —

*Theresa (interrupting him).*— Then me, too?

*Stephen (smiling).*— Naturally.

*Theresa.*— What do I care if you write against me? You will always remain my husband.

*Stephen (jokingly).*— What do you mean?

*Theresa.*— It means that you belong all to me.

*Stephen.*— I beg your pardon, not all to you.

*Theresa.*— But you did not talk like that last night, while you were going to sleep, with your head resting on my shoulder.

*Stephen.*— I was half asleep then, and I did not know what I was saying.

*Theresa.*— Yes, you did.

*Stephen.*— It seems to me you are getting a little pretentious.

*Theresa.*— I?

*Stephen (becoming serious).*— I don't like that.

*Theresa.*— I was only remembering a sentence of yours which had made me very happy.

*Stephen (angrily).*— Then you had better not repeat it, or I might be sorry to have said it.

*Theresa (sadly).*— Stephen!

*Stephen.*— Your favorite topics are: The aprons for the maid, the cook, or the usual stupid sentimentality.

*Theresa.*— But Stephen —

*Stephen.*— Please don't look cross now. What's the matter? Are you angry because I reprov'd you?

*Theresa.*— No, never!

*Stephen.*— Then smile, Theresa!

*Theresa (trying to smile).*

*Stephen.*— I want this day to be a beautiful one. All night I have been wishing for peace. I woke up suddenly after a terrible dream. But see how the sun and the sea smile at me. How brilliant is one and how quiet is the other. (*Taking Theresa by the hand and leading her to the sea*) Come, come, Theresa! Tell me, do you love this beautiful sea?

*Theresa.*— You see how blue the water is and how clear! How I should like to plunge into it and go straight to the bottom and touch the sand with my hand.

*Stephen.*— I, instead, should like to sail over it and go as far as possible.

## SCENE V

THERESA, STEPHEN, THE OLD BEGGAR AND HIS OLD WIFE

(*The old man's voice is heard*)

Close your eyes — over the sea.

Open your eyes — over the earth.

On the earth — be in peace.

Look around — day and night.

*Stephen (to Theresa).*— Who is trying to make verses in such a funny way?

*Theresa.*— It is an old beggar, who comes here twice a month, and in order to make a few cents, he recites a few verses of his own composition.

*Stephen.*— I never saw him.

*Theresa.*— So that he may not disturb you, every time he comes Valentine and I send him away immediately.

(*The old man still heard singing*)

Do help a poor sailor!

Who's without boat and without net,

Who's dying of hunger and of thirst.

*Theresa (going towards the alley).*— No, no, not today, my old man.

*Stephen.*— Why not? — Introduce me to him.

*Theresa.*— All right (*calling him back*).— You can come, don't be afraid.

*Stephen (approaching Theresa).*— And who is that old woman?

*Theresa.*— His wife. Ah! she never leaves him.

(*The old couple enter. He is about ninety, wrinkled, bent, slow, but still strong. He is barefooted and wears a ragged jacket. On his bare neck*

*he has the scapulaire of St. Lucia. He wears on his head the characteristic fisherman's cap. He also wears earrings. The old woman who accompanies him is less vivacious, and she also is dressed very poorly).*

*The old man.*— Good day.

*The old woman.*— Good day, your excellencies.

*Stephen (sitting on the steps).*— Come in, valiant man. Who has taught you to compose poetry?

*The old man (gaily).*— Hunger. I sell my prattlings so that I may buy bread for my old woman.

*Stephen.*— So you are making money with your poetry. How much do you make every day?

*The old man.*— I can't complain. Do you know my saying? —

'Who has a hundred, I ask three,  
Everything for you, a little for me.'

*Stephen.*— Before you became a poet and a beggar, were you a sailor?

*The old man.*— I was a fisherman.

*Stephen.*— Why did you leave your trade? Was the sea unfaithful to you?

*The old man.*— No Sir, only old age. (*Pointing to the sea*) The sea has never been unfaithful to anyone.

Over the sea — don't look,  
Close your eyes — and go on,  
There is a friend — near by you,  
Close your eyes — and go on.

*Stephen.*— And who is the friend on the sea?

*The old man.*— I am only prattling, you know.

*Stephen.*— Then the friend does not exist?

*The old man.*— Yes, he does exist — It is Death.

*Stephen.*— And do you call Death a friend?

*The old man.*— Yes, Sir (*sweetly*). Because it is God who sends it.

*Stephen (comically).*— You are all right. But I must reward your poetical work. Do you wish some money? Much? (*giving a handful of pennies.*) Take them.

*The old man (happy).*— God bless you! —

*The old woman (happy).*— God bless you! —

*Theresa.*— Only a cent from me, as I am not as rich as he is. (*Giving the cent.*)

*The old man (quite moved).*— But you are always good to us. (*Turning to the old woman*) Ready!

(*The old man begins to dance, murmuring:*

Lla, lla, lla,  
Lla, lla, lla —

*while the old woman keeps him in time, by clapping her hands.)*

*Stephen.*— What's that?

*Theresa.*— They always express their thanks with a little dance.  
(*To the old people*) It is sufficient.

*Stephen (laughing).*— Let them go on, they are quite amusing.

*Theresa.*— No, I say stop.

(*The old people stop immediately. Valentine's voice is heard outside.*)

## SCENE VI

STEPHEN, THERESA, THE OLD MAN, THE OLD WOMAN  
AND VALENTINE

*Valentine (approaching).*— Victory, victory, Madame Theresa! Victory!

*Theresa (makes a movement of joy, then immediately tries to control herself).*

*Stephen.*— What's the trouble with Valentine?

*Valentine.*— Victory! Victory! (*Enters from the alley, and seeing Stephen, stops suddenly, looking embarrassed.*)

(*A silence.*)

*Stephen (to Valentine).*— Will you please tell me what heroic action you have accomplished?

*Theresa (behind Stephen makes a gesture to Valentine so as to keep him quiet).*

*Valentine (to Stephen).*— What action?

*Stephen.*— Were you not screaming "Victory, victory?"

*Valentine.*— I was screaming 'Victory, victory,' because I was quite excited about some one — What's his name? An ex-officer, a good boy — A friend of mine?

*Stephen.*— The same one who was here in the Park?

*Theresa (makes another gesture to Valentine).*

*Valentine.*— Yes, that same one, we were talking about war!

*Stephen.*— About war!

*Valentine.*— It is you who have inspired me to talk about war, and since then I always talk about arms, war, victory —

*Stephen.*— What stories are these, Rigoletto? Are you now a jester?

*Valentine.*— We do what we can to please your majesty.

*Stephen.*— Be careful, you have a competitor. (*Pointing to the old man.*) Your colleague amused me more.

*Valentine.*— As a beggar and a jester he is my colleague, but as a poet he becomes yours.

*Stephen (laughing).*— Don't be impertinent, or I'll throw you into the water.

*Valentine (laughing).*— Heaven knows! Today I feel like jesting, and I might throw you into it instead!

*Stephen (still laughing).*— And would you dare to attack your master?

*Valentine.*— Yes, with both my hands.

*Stephen.*— You scoundrel, you shall be sorry for talking like that!

*Valentine.*— Perhaps I will tomorrow, not today.

*Stephen.*— I'll put you to the test.

*Valentine (posing like a gladiator).*— I am ready!

*Stephen (runs up stage and sits on the parapet, turning his shoulders to the sea).*

*Theresa.*— Be careful, Stephen.

*Stephen (folding his arms comically).*— Come on, if you have the courage.

*Valentine (running to him).*— Your end is come!

*Theresa (screaming).*

*Valentine (turning quickly).*— Madame Theresa? —

*Stephen (running to her).*— What's the matter?

*Theresa.*— No — no — don't play such tricks any more! (*Very pale*).  
Oh, my God! I was so afraid! It was horrible!

*Stephen.*— Are you serious?

*Valentine (sorry).*— I beg your pardon, Madame Theresa! What a fool I am!

*Stephen.*— Am I not right to call you silly?

*Theresa (embraces him).*

*Valentine (seeing the old couple, who are still waiting).*— What are you doing here? Are you going to stay here all day? Go away, go away! (*The old couple, without answering, exit from the alley*).

*Stephen (to Theresa, caressing her hair).*— If I ran into danger, what would you do?

*Theresa.*— I should die.

*Valentine (discreetly exits into the house).*

*Stephen.*— Why do you still tremble? Are you still afraid? — I am here — You are embracing me — holding me —

*Theresa.*— I am afraid that I annoyed you with my childish fear.

*Stephen (affectionately).*— No, Theresa, this time you did not annoy me! (*with pride*). You will never annoy me, when you make me feel how much you value me and appreciate my intellect and what I can do.

*Theresa.*— Oh, Stephen! What a comfort this is to me! (*kissing him gratefully*).

*Valentine* (*again appears at the window with his pipe, laughing*).— What are you doing there?

*Stephen* (*seeing Valentine*).— Ah, you are there, rascal?

*Valentine.*— I am smoking! (*showing the pipe*).

*Stephen.*— Down the pipe, when in front of the 'Triumph of Love!'

*Valentine.*— Down Love when in front of the 'Triumph of a pipe!'

*Stephen.*— I defy you! (*kissing Theresa*).

*Valentine.*— And I'll crush you with roses! (*throws one after the other the roses he has on his window*). You must surrender! Surrender! Surrender.

*Theresa and Stephen* (*under the rain of roses, keep on kissing each other and laughing*).

*Valentine* (*laughing*).— Surrender!

## ACT II

*Stephen Baldi's studio, very elegant and artistic. A door on the left, one on the right, and another up stage on the right, which is the general entrance. In the center up stage a large door which opens from the inside, upon the same terrace seen in the first act. There is a step outside, which must not be omitted, being part of the business. The room is very quiet. There are book-cases all around full of books. On the left side a large desk, beautifully carved. Almost in the middle a sofa. Here and there valuable bric-a-brac, flowers, etc. It is night. Only one electric lamp is lighted.*

## SCENE I

### VALENTINE AND ROMOLO

(*Valentine enters from the terrace, dressed in an evening suit, wearing over it, a rather shabby light overcoat, also an old high hat. He looks quite busy*).

Romolo! Romolo! (*rings the electric bell*). Where are you? — Madame Theresa! —

Romolo (*enters from the general entrance, with his habitual indolent air*).— If Madame Theresa does not answer, it means she is not in.

*Valentine.*— Impossible!

Romolo.— She has gone out.

*Valentine.*— When?

Romolo.— An hour after Mr. Baldi.

*Valentine.*— That's funny!

*Romolo.*— Why? Had she to ask your permission?

*Valentine.*— Don't be impertinent. I forbid you to ask me questions. Remember I am the secretary of the most celebrated poet.

*Romolo.*— All — right —

*Valentine.*— Mind your own business.

*Romolo.*— All right!

*Valentine.*— Your master orders you to put on your livery, to light up all the lanterns in the Park, illuminate the parlor, as he will be here shortly, with a most distinguished person.

*Romolo.*— And you, are you going to put on your livery?

*Valentine.*— Impertinent!

*Romolo* (*exit from general entrance*).

*Valentine* (*taking off his hat, comically*).— And I will light up the shrine. (*Turns the key of the electric light full force*).

## SCENE II

### VALENTINE AND THERESA

(*Enter Theresa from the general entrance, looking quite agitated and upset. Seeing Valentine, goes quickly to him.*)

*Theresa.*— Tell me? — All his success — the enthusiasm —

*Valentine* (*impressed by her strange manner*).— Why do you say enthusiasm?

*Theresa.*— Because I am sure he had it.

*Valentine.*— By the way! Did not the Princess Heller invite you too?

*Theresa.*— Not directly, because we don't know each other! Yet she kindly told Stephen she would be glad to see me too.

*Valentine.*— Well?

*Theresa.*— At the last moment, when I was ready, he refused to take me along.

*Valentine.*— Why?

*Theresa.*— My dress was not elegant enough, not in fashion, I looked like a servant girl.

*Valentine.*— Did he say you looked like a servant girl?

*Theresa.*— Yes.

*Valentine.*— Indeed he treats you badly!

*Theresa.*— No, Valentine, he is right, and no one should judge him. The Princess had invited all the very best people in his honor. What would they have said about us if they had seen me dressed in such poor taste?

*Valentine.*— Then you should not be so stingy about yourself. Why

don't you ask Stephen to give you a few thousand francs, and then order your dresses in Paris?

*Theresa.*— Not in Paris, but I've already found a good dressmaker and have ordered a splendid gown. Now that Stephen is received in society, if it happens that I am asked, I shall be ready.

*Valentine.*— When did you order your gown?

*Theresa.*— Tonight.

*Valentine.*— Did you go out for that?

*Theresa.*— Yes.

*Valentine.*— Was it so pressing that you could not wait till tomorrow?

*Theresa (mortified, trying to excuse herself).*— When I remained alone I felt so depressed, humiliated! I tore to pieces that horrible dress which prevented me from going with my Stephen. I believe I even fainted, for I found myself lying on the floor, and felt a strange sensation in seeing all the things most familiar to me. But as soon as I had my strength back I ran to the dressmaker immediately. Do you see anything strange in that?

*Valentine.*— There is nothing strange about that, yet it worries me. Lately you've been so nervous — So — You're taking Stephen's behavior towards you too much to heart.

*Theresa (dissimulating).*— I am not suffering.

*Valentine.*— Yes, you are, you're losing your health. What you just told me confirms what I said.

*Theresa.*— Please don't tell Stephen of it?

*Valentine.*— Don't worry, besides it would be hard now to speak to him about such details, after he has been called a 'Great Poet' by the Princess Heller!

*Theresa (taking off her hat).*— Tell me, did he look happy?

*Valentine.*— I should think so! It was an apotheosis!

*Theresa.*— A well deserved one.

*Valentine.*— Perhaps. For my part I never understood his verses, and tonight when he recited them, still less. But I don't count.

*Theresa.*— You and I cannot understand him. If he should write only for us he could not be called a genius.

*Valentine.*— There were a good many prominent people there at the house of the Princess tonight. Even the Secretary —

*Theresa.*— Of Public Education?

*Valentine.*— No, of war. This princess, whom nobody knows any thing about, has conquered pretty nearly the whole world. Her house tonight was crowded with reporters, writers, artists; even an editor had come expressly from Milan. Several dozens of marquises, counts, a quan-

tity of beautiful women wearing gowns cut as low as that (*making an exaggerated gesture*). And everyone surrounded Stephen, especially after he had read his poem 'The Need of Strength.'

*Theresa* (*quite excited, interrupting him*).— And she — the Princess? —

*Valentine*.— A queen bowing to the Emperor.

*Theresa*.— She must be an angel.

*Valentine*.— I am afraid too much so.

*Theresa*.— They say she is beautiful.

*Valentine*.— So, so, you shall judge because she is coming here tonight.

*Theresa*.— Here tonight? (*clapping her hands*). How glad I am! You are joking, Valentine. Are you?

*Valentine*.— You don't think I am capable of doing so? Princess Heller has expressed a desire to take him home in her carriage, and to visit his studio.

*Theresa*.— Then it is true?

*Valentine*.— Of course.

*Theresa*.— But you don't look as happy as I.

*Valentine*.— Of course I am (*clapping his hands as she had done before*). How glad I am!

*Theresa*.— We must prepare everything.

*Valentine*.— I came expressly in advance so as to prepare for the reception.

*Theresa* (*looking outside*).— I see the lanterns are lighted.

*Valentine*.— Yes.

*Theresa*.— I must put his desk in order; and those books on the chair —

*Valentine*.— Leave them — they make the room more interesting.

*Theresa*.— Did you give your orders to Romolo?

*Valentine*.— I told him to dress for the occasion.

*Theresa*.— We should have some flowers.

*Valentine*.— This is not a wedding.

*Theresa*.— And I? — With this shabby dress —

*Valentine*.— But you are in your own house.

*Theresa*.— Never mind, but I am not presentable.

*Valentine*.— To my mind, yes.

*Theresa*.— Don't forget I am Stephen Baldi's wife!

*Valentine*.— You have a hard position.

*Theresa*.— You are only his secretary, yet you are wearing your evening suit?

*Valentine*.— I can lend it to you.

*Theresa*.— Stop joking. I must go and dress, I'll be back in a moment.

*Valentine*.— It is too late, I hear the carriage (*running to the door*).

Yes, here she is.

*Theresa.*— Dear me, what shall I do?

*Valentine.*— Nothing at all. Go to meet them as you are.

*Theresa.*— To receive them? Never!

*Valentine.*— It is your duty.

*Theresa.*— No! no! Stephen might scold me!

*Valentine.*— You are worse than a child!

*Theresa (trying to look outside).*— How beautiful she is!

*Valentine.*— I told you she was so—so. But she uses too much perfume.

*Theresa.*— And how happy he looks, he seems taller, thinner—

*Valentine.*— Precisely! In three hours he has grown thinner and taller.

*Theresa.*— Here they come, I must hide myself.

*Valentine.*— You must stay.

*Theresa.*— *Then remain also.*

### SCENE III

THERESA, VALENTINE, STEPHEN, MERALDA

*(Stephen is in evening dress, and wearing a white flower in his button-hole. Meralda is a beautiful woman past thirty, very fascinating and very stylish.)*

*Meralda's voice.*— Before entering your sacred temple, how I would like to feel worthy of your intellect.

*Stephen's voice.*— It is I, Princess, who am not worthy of your kindness.

*Meralda (entering, letting her beautiful opera cloak slip from her shoulders, goes to his desk immediately).*

*Stephen (helps her with the cloak immediately, and when he goes to put it on the chair, he sees Theresa and Valentine).*— I thought you were in bed!

*Valentine (interfering).*— She was anxious to know all about it.

*Stephen.*— I did not ask your opinion. Go.

*(Valentine exit.)*

*Meralda (who has heard the whispering, turns).*

*Stephen (introducing them against his will).*— Princess— My wife.

*Theresa (advancing timidly and bowing awkwardly).*— Princess.

*Meralda (giving her hand unaffectedly).*— I am very glad to meet you. I often tried to find out in your husband's writings something which would point me out the fortunate woman whom he had chosen as his companion *(looking at her steadily)*. Fate has given you a very difficult task, indeed, which however is envied by others.

*Theresa (timidly).*— In fact I am very happy.

*Meralda.*— And very proud of him, I am sure.

*Theresa.*— Yes, very proud!

*Meralda (laughing a little at her).*— Or perhaps the continual intimacy makes you undervalue the great privilege you have.

*Theresa.*— No, no! — on the contrary! —

*Meralda.*— It would be natural if you felt like that, though.

*Theresa.*— — How can you think so?

*Meralda.*— You might have wished for a husband less immersed in his ideals, less independent, more a home body —

*Theresa.*— We have always been good comrades; you are accusing him unjustly.

*Stephen.*— Theresa, you don't understand what the Princess means. You should not defend me.

*Theresa.*— I know you don't need my defense, yet I must do it, if they accuse you.

*Stephen (trying not to lose his patience).*

*Meralda.*— But I did not accuse him.

*Theresa.*— I should not like —

*Stephen (interrupting her).*— Don't insist, Theresa.

*Meralda (in a mocking tone).*— Let her talk.

*Theresa (to Meralda).*— Ah! you are becoming my friend. (*Taking courage.*) Please be seated, Princess. Pardon me for not offering you a chair before (*pointing to the sofa*). Do sit there. (*Meralda sits on the sofa. Theresa taking a low chair sits next to her and goes on talking with animation.*) You are so interested in my Stephen, that I must explain how things are, I know I am silly, and he often says it to me, yet I am not so silly as not to understand that he is not an ordinary husband. He goes here and there, but in the end he always returns to his little wife for rest. If sometime you could only see him, how he laughs and jests like a child and falls asleep like a tired baby (*not paying any attention to him*). What more could I wish? My only sorrow is that I have no children, yet —

*Stephen.*— Enough!

*Meralda (to Stephen).*— But why?

*Stephen.*— She is tiring you.

*Meralda.*— Not a bit of it, she is amusing me.

*Theresa (looking at her, sadly astonished — a brief silence).*

*Meralda.*— Go on.

*Theresa (rising).*— No, Princess, no; will you excuse me?

*Meralda.*— Why?

*Theresa.*— I am not feeling well.

*Stephen (looking at Theresa severely).*

*Meralda.*— Do sit again.

*Theresa (trembling under Stephen's looks).*— Good night, Princess —

*Meralda.*— Good by, Madame.  
*Theresa* (*exit from right door*).

## SCENE IV

MERALDA, STEPHEN

*Stephen.*— I beg of you, Meralda, not to pity me.

*Meralda.*— She is sweet. She must be very affectionate also and good —But no doubt it is a hybrid union.

*Stephen.*— Let us speak of something else, Meralda.

*Meralda.*— If I am your friend — your best friend, you should confide in me the mystery of your choice.

*Stephen.*— Simply hazard.

*Meralda.*— A rebel like you consented to obey?

*Stephen.*— I did not take the trouble to rebel in this episode, to which I do not attach material importance.

*Meralda.*— It seems to me this episode would have had some influence on your life.

*Stephen.*— I never allowed a woman to influence my life, not even you, who are the most complete woman I have ever known, still less then, the poor creature you have just met. Therefore you must not demand from me what's against my nature. When I married I did not know myself. If I had met a superior woman I should perhaps have found courage to tell her my rights of supremacy; but even at that time, my instinct guided me. Theresa's humility attracted me. You may detect from the simple story of my marriage my real temperament. I warn you it will be impossible to change me. Are you satisfied?

*Meralda* (*with resignation*).— I am satisfied.

*Stephen.*— Is it peace or war?

*Meralda.*— Peace. I surrender. I lay down my arms, and here is my white flag. I'll accept your terms, and from now on, if you wish (*sadly*) I'll become another episode. I am satisfied that the artist has opened the door of his temple to me and am resigned to the man's indifference.

*Stephen* (*gallantly*).— Why do you speak about indifference? I am very far from sacrificing all the facts regarding the existence of love. Indeed I wish to awaken my energy again and to become the slave of morality and civilization. I say to the woman: 'If you come to me to put a limit to my independence I repudiate you, but if you will be a source of triumph and if you will nourish my ideals with your sensibility, you are welcome. I was waiting for you, my charming guest. So long as you are mine, you will not feel my supremacy!'

*Meralda.*— Well (*sighing*) — the most complete woman whom you have ever known agrees with you (*letting her handkerchief fall*).

*Stephen* (*picking it up, kneels in front of her, and remains in this position for a few seconds*).— The proudest man is at your feet.

*Meralda.*— I let my handkerchief fall so as to have that illusion.

*Stephen.*— To have this pretext, I pick it up (*offering it to her*).

*Meralda* (*taking it*).

*Stephen* (*kissing her hand*).

*Meralda.*— Thank you.

*Stephen* (*rising*).

*Meralda* (*quickly rising too*).— Did you ever ask yourself if in my personality there is something different from what people see in me?

*Stephen.*— You are as I see you.

*Meralda.*— And — My past does not worry you?

*Stephen.*— No.

*Meralda.*— Therefore you are satisfied to know what everybody knows; that is — I was born in a small town near Venice, and that my family, though noble, were poor; and that very young I married a rich German —

*Stephen.*— — And that at twenty-four years old you were left a widow, noble, a millionaire, and alone. It seems to me you have already given many details of your past.

*Meralda* (*trying to scrutinize his thoughts*).— Don't you mistrust such an exacting story?

*Stephen.*— No.

*Meralda.*— I am sorry.

*Stephen.*— Why?

*Meralda.*— You should understand that a woman like me is tormented by curiosity to know if she could still rely on the affection of her chosen friend, even without all the glitter and admiration which surrounds her.

*Stephen.*— My loyalty to you, *Meralda*, should convince you of my sentiments. What would you say if I also doubted your sincerity, especially tonight, after my triumph, after the admiration which I was able to arouse in your friends? You say you would like to leave your title for a day or an hour and be a simple woman. But why underestimate and destroy your power? No! You must remain as you are.

*Meralda* (*disappointed*).— I shall obey you and remain as I am. (*In a changed tone.*) Will you take me to the carriage, my conqueror?

*Stephen.*— I am your slave!

*Meralda* (*smiles*).

*Stephen.*— Sometimes I shall be more obedient than a slave.

*Meralda* (*smiling and caressing him with the point of her fan*).— My cloak, please.

*Stephen (takes the cloak and helps her with it, murmuring, Are you mine?)*

*Meralda.*— Alas, yes!

*Stephen.*— And I? — am yours.

*Meralda.*— Alas, no!

*Stephen (offering his arm, they go out from the general entrance).*— This is the shortest way.

*Meralda.*— Out?

*Stephen.*— And in.

*(Both go out)*

## SCENE V

VALENTINE, STEPHEN, THERESA, THEN ROMOLO.

*Valentine (enters, laughing).*— Madame Theresa! The Goddess is gone! *(Comically)* The wife of this great man always disappears! *(Exit on the right, calling Madame Theresea, Madame Theresa!)*

*Stephen (entering).*— Where are you going?

*Valentine (returning).*— I saw you accompanying the Princess to the carriage. I came back here to talk with your wife; not finding her, I went to hunt her up.

*Stephen.*— If you think I am in a mood now to listen to your prattle you're mistaken.

*Valentine.*— All right!

*Stephen.*— If you only knew how tired I am of always listening to your silly talk. Ah, the joy of living alone!

*Valentine (earnestly).*— Listen to me: when Madame Theresa comes in; please don't scold her. She is already much upset.

*Stephen.*— You always exaggerate!

*Valentine.*— If you knew what she did tonight!

*Stephen.*— What did she do?

*Valentine.*— Hush, here she comes!

*Theresa (entering, looking pale, as if she had been crying;— to Stephen).*— Did you call me?

*Stephen (trying not to be cross).*— No, Theresa.

*Theresa.*— Do you wish me to go back to my room?

*Stephen.*— We have nothing to say to each other. When you are excited like that I prefer to avoid you.

*Theresa.*— Excited?

*Stephen.*— Yes, Valentine was telling me how strangely you acted tonight.

*Valentine* (angry at his imprudence).

*Theresa*.— I was happy in your success.

*Stephen*.— And why are you crying, then?

*Valentine* (aside).— I must go, or there will be trouble.

(*Exit to the terrace*).

*Theresa*.— The Princess offended me.

*Stephen*.— She had no intention of doing so. You looked so awkward that unwittingly she showed her impression. You will learn to remain in your room. You should use more tact, and not put me in such embarrassing positions. And to think that you believe yourself a perfect wife!

*Theresa*.— I haven't that illusion. But you must teach me. What shall I do?

*Stephen*.— I haven't the time to teach you what to do. Try to control yourself.

*Theresa*.— I should like to know in what I displease you?

*Stephen*.— For instance, now; your tears provoke me.

*Theresa*.— Then I shall laugh. Yes, of course you're right, I looked very awkward. And now I must laugh (*forcing herself to laugh*.)

*Stephen*.— It's enough.

*Theresa*.— But I am indeed much amused!

*Valentine* (enters).— When I am not here they are in good humor.

*Theresa*.— I say, Valentine, did I not look funny? (*Laughing very hysterically*.)

*Valentine*.— She is hysterical.

*Stephen*.— Mind your business. You should respect me! (*Theresa stops laughing at once and falls on a chair*.)

*Valentine*.— I always try to respect you.

*Stephen*.— I am not speaking about you.

*Theresa*.— Then, you mean me?

*Stephen*.— In order to keep up my work, I must concentrate all my thoughts, all my ideals. I must reject all affections, all the silly annoyances. If my wife was not such an ordinary little creature, she would remain at my side and watch me silently. Indeed, that would be a proof of her respect.

*Theresa*.— If it is for your good, I shall disappear entirely.

*Stephen*.— Bravo! Now you are contemplating suicide!

*Theresa*.— No, Stephen, not that. I was thinking of going away.

*Stephen*.— Where?

*Theresa*.— I don't know — to a convent.

*Stephen*.— Convent?

*Theresa*.— Or to my aunt's.

*Stephen*.— Naturally — I — I could not prevent you from going there.

Of course not for always, but for a little while. She lives so near here. Then I could finish my work. And after a few months of separation, you would come back a better wife.

*Theresa (crying).*— I shall go for good. You're tired of me, I know it.

*Stephen.*— Now, don't begin to cry again!

*Valentine.*— Good gracious! You're sending her away, and you don't want her to cry!

*Stephen (exasperated).*— Ah! (*exit on the right, slamming the door*).

*Theresa (crying).*— He cannot bear my presence any longer!

*Valentine.*— Tomorrow morning the storm will be past.

*Theresa.*— I'd better go. I am not worthy of him. He will be free.

*Valentine.*— Tomorrow morning he will be all right again.

*Theresa.*— I must go now or tomorrow morning I shall not have the courage to go.

*Valentine.*— You must not go.

*Theresa.*— I must not spoil his life, or I shall regret it, and he will hate me like an enemy. No, I must go (*looking strangely*).

*Valentine.*— Now, don't excite yourself.

*Theresa (quite excited).*— You don't see anything, but I see!—Quick, quick! The carriage is still waiting outside, I must take this opportunity and go at once! (*Taking her hat, which is on the chair, and putting it on, trembling.*)

*Valentine.*— For pity's sake, Madame Theresa, be yourself. (*Going to the door.*) Stephen! Madame Theresa wants to go, Stephen!

*Theresa.*— You see, he does not answer.

*Valentine.*— Stephen!—

*Theresa (looking at the door).*

*Valentine (anxiously waiting for the answer, not daring to call again).*  
(*A silence*)

*Theresa (with resignation).*— He does not answer.

*Valentine.*— After all, you are going to your aunt, you say for always, but I am convinced only for one night. (*Taking hat and coat.*) And I'll come with you.

*Theresa.*— No, I want you to remain with him. He is so nervous tonight.

*Valentine.*— But I'll be back immediately.

*Theresa.*— I shall be more at ease if you remain.

*Valentine (trying to follow her).*

*Theresa (turning).*— I implore you to remain! (*Theresa on the threshold of the door, which opens upon the terrace.*) Tell Stephen— that— even at a distance, I shall only live for him, and some day if he will forgive

me for having annoyed him, I shall be very grateful to him. Good by, Valentine.

*Valentine (drying a tear).—*No, this will never do. (*Goes to the door, murmurs, she is gone.*) (*Slowly returns, rings the bell.*)

*(Enter Romolo, half asleep)*

*Valentine.—*Did you close the gate?

*Romolo.—*I did.

*Valentine.—*You can go to bed. I'll close up here.

*(Romolo exit)*

*Valentine (closing the door).*

*(Enter Stephen, wearing a smoking jacket. He is quite agitated)*

*Valentine.—*You're too late. Madame Theresa is gone.

*Stephen.—*I heard her.

*Valentine.—*She took your carriage to go to her aunt's.

*Stephen.—*I thought you went with her.

*Valentine.—*She refused to have me. (*After a silence.*) You're ungrateful.

*Stephen (nervously).—*Ungrateful? Why? To whom? I don't owe anything to anyone! And I don't need anyone!

*Valentine.—*Not even her?

*Stephen.—*Her less than the others.

*Valentine.—*Yes, and why then do you look so worried?

*Stephen.—*I am worried, because, perhaps she is suffering. I am not so hard as you think. But she is not indispensable to my life.

*Valentine (firmly).—*The humblest woman may be indispensable to the proudest man.

*Stephen (bitterly).—*Your philosophy is absurd. Go to the devil!  
*(A silence)*

*Stephen (sitting near his desk).*

*Valentine.—*Are you going to work?

*Stephen.—*Yes.

*Valentine.—*Can you work?

*Stephen (proudly, but not sincerely).—*Yes.

*Valentine (lights the lamp on the desk and puts out the others).*

*Stephen (forcing himself to write).*

*Valentine.—*Good night. (*Going out left, stopping suddenly*)

*Stephen!—*Somebody is scratching at the door!

*Stephen.—*Who is it?

*Valentine.—*The noise is coming from there. (*Going to the door.*)

*Stephen (pushing him aside, opens the door himself).*

*Theresa (who was leaning at the door, convulsively, without her hat, her*

hair hanging, as soon as the door opens falls on her knees, on account of the step, which is outside).

Stephen (screaming).— Theresa! (taking her in his arms, carries her to the sofa).

Valentine (trembling, looking at them, not daring to approach her).

Theresa (without uttering a word, with her eyes open).

Stephen.— Theresa! — Why don't you speak?

Theresa (almost as if awakening).— I saw — I saw — a lost child in the woods (changing tone) — The wind was blowing. (Sweetly.)  
Everything in the world is beautiful.

Stephen.— Valentine! — What's that?

Valentine (in agony).— Good God!

Theresa.— Everything in the world is beautiful.

### ACT III

The same scene as the second act. The action takes place in the afternoon.  
The door up stage is open.

### SCENE I

VALENTINE, THEN THE OLD BEGGAR

Valentine (smoking his pipe, while he is busy pasting some paper on a cardboard.)— Work helps a man to be noble, therefore, I, being a man (holding up the cardboard) — Yes, it looks all right, it is large enough for all the words I wish to write on it (laying his cardboard on the floor again, begins to spell with his finger the words he intends to write): 'From today, this villa for sale, with all the furniture.' No, there are too many words. I'll cut out 'From today'; anyhow they'll understand just the same. (Rises and takes a large inkstand and a brush, then begins to write.)

The old man's voice.— Who has a hundred, I ask three —

Everything for you, a little for me.

Valentine.— Oh, oh! My colleague is still alive!

The old man's voice.— Do help a poor sailor.

(He appears, coming through the Park, older looking and more tired.)

Valentine.— Come in, dear colleague, come in. I cannot come to welcome you in the Park, because I am busy working. You never work, do you? If you will honor me with your brilliant conversation, I shall be very happy.

The old man (entering).— Who's without boat and without net,  
Who's dying of hunger — and of thirst.

*Valentine.*— This is the old stuff. Have you invented anything new? You've been absent for two years, haven't you?

*The old man.*— Yes, two years.

*Valentine.*— And you have not composed anything new?

*The old man.*— What do you say?

*Valentine.*— I understand. We are expecting too much from these poets. And where is your charming wife?

*The old man.*— She is dead.

*Valentine.*— That's why you look so sad. Well, she had to go first, she was less strong than you.

*The old man.*— She did not die a natural death.

*Valentine.*— How did she die?

*The old man.*— Under a car.

*Valentine.*— Truly?

*The old man.*— Down there, at the turn of the street.

*Valentine.*— It was horrible.

*The old man.*— If God had called her naturally — but die in that way (*crying*) — No, no.

*Valentine.*— And why did you not come here any more?

*The old man.*— That same day they put me in prison.

*Valentine.*— In prison?

*The old man.*— Yes, at the old man's home.

*Valentine.*— I see, and then they sent you away?

*The old man.*— No, I ran away.

*Valentine.*— You were wrong. At least you had a bed and something to eat.

*The old man.*— My liberty, sir, my liberty first of all!

*Valentine.*— I understand one has to live.

*The old man.*— There are so many kind-hearted people in the world who are ready to help you. If one says 'No,' the other says 'Yes,' and a good many never say 'No.'

*Valentine* (*putting his hand in his pocket*).— I generally say 'no,' because I don't pretend to have a kind heart, but today, to make an exception, I shall say 'Yes' (*giving him a cent*). And now go (*begins to work again*).

*The old man* (*trying to dance again*).—

Lla, lla, lla.

(*but he cannot go on*).

*Valentine.*— Never mind, that's all right.

*The old man.*— I cannot do it any more. She who helped me is gone.

(*A pause*)

*Valentine.*— If you are hoping to get more money you are mistaken.

Your other colleague in literature is not at home, and Madame, I am afraid, will never recognize you.

*The old man.*— You're joking (*laughing*).

*Valentine.*— No, I am not.

*The old man.*— She was very kind to me.

*Valentine.*— Things do not always go as we want. Down there your wife died under a car; here in Posilipo your kind lady has lost her mind.

*The old man.*— You like to joke!

*Valentine.*— All right.

## SCENE II

VALENTINE, THE OLD MAN, THERESA

*Theresa (from inside).*— Who's stepping on my train? You are spoiling my beautiful gown.

*The old man (to Valentine).*— Now you shall see how kind she will be to me.

*Theresa (enters from the right. She wears a beautiful evening gown. Her hair is untidy, and strangely arranged with flowers and curls. She wears a pair of old shoes, walks slowly, looking at her train. She is very pale, but she does not look as if she were suffering).*

*The old man (bowing).*— I am the poor sailor —

*Valentine.*— Keep quiet (*to Theresa*). Be careful, Madame Theresa, this is ink. I had better move (*picks up the inkstand, and puts everything away on the desk*). I am afraid I shall spoil your dress.

*Theresa.*— You're very kind. Who's taught you to be so?

*Valentine.*— I learned it from you.

*Theresa.*— Where did you meet me?

*Valentine.*— I believe everywhere.

*Theresa.*— How was I dressed?

*Valentine (putting aside the books and newspapers so as to make a place on the desk).*— Not like today. Today you are very elegant.

*Theresa.*— I know it.

*Valentine.*— You have a beautiful dress.

*Theresa.*— Thank you (*looking at the dress*).

*The old man (trying to attract her attention, begins to recite).*—

Close your eyes — over the sea,

Open your eyes — over the earth.

*Theresa (when she hears these words, she turns suddenly around and ends the strophe in the same monotonous way given by the old man) —*

On the earth — be in peace,

Look around — day and night.

*Valentine (surprised, aside).— How strange!*

*The old man (happy to be remembered).— You see! You see!*

*Theresa (approaches and examines him).*

*Valentine (much interested, goes to her so as to make another experiment).—*

Madame Theresa, do you wish these pennies to give to the beggar? (*Giving the money.*)

*Theresa (mechanically takes them, and looks around as if looking for somebody else).*

*Valentine (pointing to the old man).— There he is.*

*The old man (stretches out his hand).*

*Theresa (smiles at him, then hesitating).*

*Valentine.— Well?*

*Theresa.— By and by.*

*The old man (discouraged).— I have no more luck since I lost my old woman.*

*Valentine.— She said by and by she will give them to you. (To Theresa.)*  
Won't you?

*Theresa (sweetly).— I don't know.*

*Valentine.— Yes, you must; you were one of those who never said 'No.'*

*Theresa.— I am too little! —*

*Valentine.— Yes! — (looks at her for a second, then shrugs his shoulders and returns to work).*

*'This villa is for sale with all the furniture.'*

*Theresa (to the old man).— You also are very kind.*

### SCENE III

VALENTINE, THERESA, THE OLD MAN, STEPHEN

(*Enter Stephen from the terrace, looking thinner and sad. He does not notice the old man, who bows to him, but in passing near Theresa looks at her more sharply than pitifully. He sits down immediately, near his desk.*)

*Valentine.— Did you walk much?*

*Stephen.— Yes.*

*Theresa (seeing Stephen, she becomes a little frightened as if fearing he may scold her. Putting her finger to her lips, approaches the old man).— Hush! Hush! Come with me. (Taking him by the arm, both exit upon the terrace, she murmuring, don't make any noise).*

*Stephen (watching Theresa from the corner of his eyes).— Has she been here long?*

*Valentine.— Madame Theresa?*

*Stephen.— Of course!*

*Valentine.*— Only a few minutes.

*Stephen (mistrustfully).*— Was she talking — to the old man? —

*Valentine.*— Yes, to him and to me.

*Stephen.*— And she went out because I came in?

*Valentine.*— I am afraid one would become insane if one should try to find any connection either in her actions or in your words.

*Stephen.*— No, if she does that there is a connection.

*Valentine (trying to change the conversation).*— Should we hang this on the gate or in the window? I should suggest the gate, it will be seen more. Don't you think it looks fine? I am sure we'll get a lot of offers as soon as we put it out.

*Stephen.*— Don't bother any more. The villa is sold.

*Valentine.*— What! And for once I worked so hard! (*throwing aside the cardboard.*) When you decided to sell this place, had you already an offer?

*Stephen.*— Yes, a very good one.

*Valentine.*— Then, I understand, the buyer is a woman?

*Stephen.*— Don't insinuate so idiotically.

*Valentine.*— I may be an idiot, yet Princess Heller was very enthusiastic about this place, and if you sold it to her you would have the privilege of seeing it again often, and perhaps find a commemorative stone set in your honor.

*Stephen.*— I am no longer on good terms with her, since the scandal which revealed her origin and intrigues. You know it, still you take pleasure in throwing the whole circumstance in my face.

*Valentine.*— In other words, I am a tyrant! But I was speaking in good faith. So there was a scandal? And your friendship is broken? And you never see each other? My congratulations! Now, I am only sorry you were too quick in arranging the deal.

*Stephen.*— The purchaser is a rich man.

*Valentine.*— Who is he?

*Stephen.*— Mr. Marcolini.

*Valentine.*— A banker?

*Stephen.*— No, a brewer.

*Valentine.*— Dear me! I should have preferred at least a banker. I am surprised that you should know such vulgar people.

*Stephen.*— One of my lawyer's clients.

*Valentine.*— Is it that fat old man who came here yesterday with a pretty young wife? She is all right, she will enjoy this place.

*Stephen.*— You seem in a good humor today.

*Valentine.*— Well, you see, I depend on you.

*Stephen.*— And do you expect me still to go on taking care of you?

*Valentine.*— Now you will have money from Mr. Marcolini.

*Stephen.*— But I have debts to pay off.

*Valentine.*— But if you sold this place for a good price? It's true you have not done a thing for two years. You wished so much liberty, and when you got it, you remained without inspiration. (*Trying to encourage him.*) You will be all right, and I am sure you will soon be able to regain what you have lost. It will not be necessary either to write that famous poem which you say is going to astonish the world. Take my advice, throw this (*taking the manuscript*) in the fire, and begin life anew. You're still well known.

*Stephen.*— Ah! I am still well known.

*Valentine.*— They have not forgotten you yet. I often read your name in the newspapers and magazines —

*Stephen.*— They only remember me in their denunciation; they reproach my silence, my presumption, my incompetence.

*Valentine.*— Let them say what they like, but do something else.

*Stephen.*— What?

*Valentine.*— Become a newspaper man. It pays well, and it is a very easy profession.

*Stephen.*— It is the profession of 'lies,' and to be a good liar you must have talent.

*Valentine.*— But you have that.

*Stephen.*— You feel it is your duty to flatter me? Once you were paid for that, but no more now. Flattery hurts me, poisons me! Where is my talent gone? Where? I cannot find it, either for the poem I once wished to create or for the simplest verse! I have spent night after night, and you know it, at this desk, looking for an idea, but in vain. I am incapable of thinking. I feel the agony of my poor brain. The terrible truth is that my machine has lost its 'power.'

(*A silence*)

(*From outside the old man is heard singing*)—

Lla, lla, lla,

Lla, lla, lla —

(*Theresa, also from outside, repeats the song, clapping her hands so as to keep time.*)

Lla, lla, lla,

Lla, lla, lla.

*Valentine.*— It is she (*looking outside*).

*Stephen.*— What is she doing?

*Valentine.*— She goes with him towards the gate, and the old man is dancing. Evidently she gave him a penny.

*Stephen.*— Is she clapping her hands?

*Valentine.*— Yes, as the old woman used to do.

*Stephen.*— Is it not the old woman with him?

*Valentine.*— No, she is dead (*still looking outside*). Now the dance ceases, she speaks to him, and the old man cries.

*Stephen.*— What is she telling him?

*Valentine.*— I can't hear, they are so far away. She motioned him to sit down under a tree; they both look happy now. She is comforting him.

*Stephen (sharply).*— Valentine, come here!

*Valentine.*— What's the matter?

*Stephen.*— You are annoying me.

*Valentine.*— But you asked me to tell you what she was doing.

*Stephen.*— Don't pay any attention to my temper. You always make me feel my inferior position.

*Valentine.*— A few minutes ago you said I was flattering you —

*Stephen (much excited).*— Yes, you are flattering me like a slave, so that I may be indulgent towards you. What am I to you? Nothing! You've more mercy for that old man, than for me! You are telling me she is comforting him, therefore he deserves more pity than I — he becomes more interesting —

*Valentine.*— But you don't want to be pitied, do you?

*Stephen.*— No, I don't want to be pitied, and to the last I want to say that I don't owe anything to anyone. You've all been wishing for my fall. That was your kindness! But I am not surrendering myself, nor yielding. I'd rather disappear (*tearing the manuscript*) and destroy — my work than to be pitied. No, I can yet despise and laugh at you! (*Pause, then supporting himself with his desk, convulsively, as if talking to his conscience.*) No! — It is not so! — It is not so! —

*Valentine (very calm, trying not to be seen by Stephen, picks up the torn manuscript, and puts everything in the drawer).*

*Theresa's voice (outside).*— You see that fairy going towards my home? She walks on the flower-beds, without spoiling them!

*Stephen (to Valentine).*— Who is coming?

*Valentine (goes to the door astonished).*— The Princess Heller!

*Stephen (astonished).*— Why, is she coming here? —

*Valentine.*— If you don't want to see her, I'll get rid of her.

*Stephen (after a second).*— No, I'll see her.

*Valentine (shrugging his shoulders).*— All right.

(*Exit right*)

*Stephen (going to meet her, but she appears before he reaches the threshold).*

## SCENE IV

STEPHEN AND MERALDA

*Meralda (seriously).*— Will you give me a few minutes?

*Stephen.*— Yes.

*Meralda (advances).*

*Stephen (closes the door).*— I am really surprised to see you.

*Meralda.*— If I had sent for you, would you have come?

*Stephen.*— No.

*Meralda.*— Therefore you should not be surprised that I came. I wanted to ask a favor from you before going away.

*Stephen.*— Are you going away?

*Meralda.*— Yes, I leave Naples.

*Stephen.*— For always?

*Meralda.*— For always.

*Stephen.*— Where are you going?

*Meralda.*— I don't know.

(*A pause*)

*Stephen.*— You wanted a favor from me?

*Meralda.*— You have my letters; will you please return them to me? I will return yours. (*Giving her letters.*)

*Stephen (opens a drawer of his desk, takes out a bunch of letters, which he offers to Meralda, and puts back his).*

*Meralda.*— You don't ask me for any explanation?

*Stephen.*— There is nothing to say! We made a contract on 'Vanity.' You were the great lady who had led into your house all the powers and aristocracy. And I was the eminent man who was trying to conquer that same crowd! I was useful to your vanity, as you were to mine. We allied our egotism, and both of us knew we were lying to each other! But we have broken the conditions of our contract. I've lost my power, and you've let one of your former lovers reveal, for revenge, all your story of your adventurous life; therefore, you too, have come down from your 'gold pedestal.' You are going away in search of more adventures and more lies, while I (*without energy*) remain here, to contemplate the truth of my catastrophe! What explanation should I ask of you? Nothing binds us any longer!

*Meralda (sitting).*— It seems to me, now that we have unmasked each other, we are still bound to each other through our fall!

*Stephen.*— You mean? —

*Meralda.*— I don't deny that our contest was 'Vanity.' Yet behind my vanity, there was the woman; eager, anxious, corrupted, if you will, but

not perverse. She often tried, without success though, to make you understand her inner thoughts. You say I am going in search of other lies. You're mistaken, I am tired of them, I assure you. I returned your letters and took back mine expressly because these documents are false. Will I look for other adventures? Yes, but I shall look again for what even a corrupted woman is anxious to have — Love!

*Stephen.*— You could not ask that from me, who never understood love, not even when I had the illusion of life.

*Meralda.*— It was of that I wanted to speak to you. Now that you've lost your illusions, now that you're suffering because your ambition has been checked; well, take a new road. Begin to admit that precious element of joy which you have so far repudiated,

*Stephen.*— No, Meralda, everything is ended for me!

*Meralda.*— You're mistaken, and I will prove it to you.

*Stephen.*— How?

*Meralda.*— I wish you would turn your back upon the scepter of 'Glory' which has deceived and tortured you. I wish to take you away from this idle melancholy, which is consuming you. I wish to free you from this tomb, where perhaps you've planned your mental suicide.

*Stephen (repellently).*— I don't understand you. I don't want to understand you.

*Meralda.*— I want you to associate with my ideas, and look at life in a different way. To go out in the world care-free, without expecting either applause or homage. To break entirely with all social laws, and every day be satisfied with a new sensation. This is what I am proposing to you, Stephen.

*Stephen.*— I refuse.

*Meralda.*— So you are hoping to work again?

*Stephen.*— No!

*Meralda.*— And then (*slowly*)? — Will you be satisfied with pity?

*Stephen (quickly).*— So you came here for that? To inflict upon me your railings! You came here to remind me of those who once envied me, so that you may tell them you saw me humiliated! If you think you have accomplished your mission, you're mistaken. You'd better leave me in my tomb. Go!

*Meralda (rising quickly).*— When I am gone you will be sorry that you sent me away (*a little moved*).— You know that I loved you, and that I came here because I love you. In this moment you don't know exactly what you are saying, but tomorrow you will want me and you will send for me.

*Stephen.*— I shall not send for you, because your prospects horrify me.

*Meralda.*— It is the only thing which will help you!

*Stephen.*— You are advising me to run away like a coward, and associate myself with you, who are richer than I am.

*Meralda.*— Are you still fighting with your pride?

*Stephen.*— You are proposing to me to abandon the poor insane woman, who has been a devoted wife to me. You must admit, your advice is revolting!

*Meralda.*— I don't deserve your accusation, as my egotism was never like yours, that is blind to all sacrifices people were making for you. After all, my idea should not be so revolting, as you do not exist any more for that poor unfortunate. She does not want you, she does not speak to you, nor can she recognize you. You were ready to abandon her when she needed you, why not now, when your presence does not alleviate her sufferings? You want to remain here so as to quiet her conscience? But a Sister of Charity or a nurse would be of more help to her!

*Stephen (sitting).*— I must admit you are right. You make me realize the terrible truth. I must now find a means of earning my living. I shall fall lower and lower —

(*A pause*)

*Meralda (sure of herself, affectionately).*— Don't decide now, you are too agitated, think it over. I will postpone my departure.

*Stephen.*— Yes.

*Meralda.*— Au revoir, Stephen! —

*Stephen (does not answer).*

*Meralda (going towards the terrace).*

## SCENE V

STEPHEN, MERALDA, THERESA

(*When Meralda is near the door Theresa enters, looking ecstatic. Stephen rises quickly, and trembles. Meralda also is a little frightened, and would like to go at once, but unwittingly Theresa prevents her.*)

*Theresa (sweetly).*— Where are you going? — How are you made? You perfume the air! — Give me a little of it! (*going to touch her*).

*Stephen (quickly).*— No, Theresa.

*Theresa (sadly).*— Why?

*Meralda (frightened, takes this opportunity to make her escape).*

*Theresa.*— Why?

*Stephen (in despair).*— Theresa! — Theresa! — Don't you understand what is happening! Can you not see me? Can you not see what I have become now, since you left me? (*taking her by the arm*). Can you not find a word, even a cursing one, so as to detain me here? —

*Theresa (laughing).*

*Stephen (letting her arm go).—Nothing! Nothing! (Worn out, falls on a chair). Nothing!*

*Theresa (goes on laughing).*

## ACT IV

*Stephen Baldi's studio. The room now has a squalid appearance. It is night. Only the electric lamp is lighted on the desk. All the bric-a-brac has been removed, and also there are no more books nor manuscripts on the desk. On the floor there are some boxes, a trunk and a dress suit case.*

### SCENE I

STEPHEN, VALENTINE, A SERVANT AND TWO PORTERS

*Stephen (seated at his desk, writing letters; he looks very pale. Valentine is packing).*

*Stephen (without raising his head).—Close the trunk and the dress suit case, and give me the keys.*

*Valentine.—Have you anything else to put in?*

*Stephen.—No.*

*Valentine (closes the trunk and the dress suit case, and puts the key on the desk).*

*Stephen (putting the keys in his pocket).—Send them away.*

*Valentine (going to the door and calling):—You may come in.*

*(Enter a servant and a porter)*

*Valentine.—Take the trunk and the dress suit case to the station immediately.*

*Stephen (to the servant).—Tonio, tell the Princess that I'll meet her at the station at eleven, but the train goes at eleven fifteen.*

*(The porter goes out with the trunk and the servant with the dress suit case)*

*Valentine.—So you are both going away tonight?*

*Stephen.—Yes.*

*Valentine (going to close the door).*

*Stephen.—Leave the door open, it is so warm here.*

*(A pause)*

*Valentine (going on packing).—What shall I do with all these books and manuscripts?*

*Stephen.—Take them home with you.*

*Valentine.—But shall I have a home?*

*Stephen.—Sell them or burn them.*

*Valentine.*— When Mr. Marcolini comes here tomorrow I'll try to make him buy them. It is true that he told me he never read a book in his life; but there is his wife — She says she is very fond of animals; maybe she is also fond of literature.

(*A silence*)

*Stephen.*— Will you please send these four letters ?

*Valentine (counting the letters).*— But there are five.

*Stephen.*— No, that large envelope contains a little money for you to use while you are looking for a position.

*Valentine.*— Thanks.

*Stephen.*— Everything has been arranged. You were right when you said that after paying all pressing debts, there would remain little. I left everything in the hands of my lawyer, who will pay the hospital expenses. I did not leave her in the care of the aunt, because I don't trust her. The superintendent of the hospital has promised me to take good care of Theresa and tomorrow morning a nurse will call for her. Will you please accompany them too. I told the superintendent you were a relation of ours, therefore they will allow you to visit Theresa.

*Valentine.*— I see you have thought of everything.

*Stephen.*— Yes, of you also.

*Valentine.*— I have already thanked you.

*Stephen.*— For the money.

*Valentine.*— Have I something else to thank you for.

*Stephen.*— Yes, I have arranged for you to see her sometimes.

*Valentine.*— Yes, I thank you especially for Theresa's sake. I understand she will be well cared for, but it will always be among strangers. Since we cannot rely on her aunt, I am glad I shall be useful to her. We said she does not distinguish one person from another? I am not quite sure about that. For instance, she seems so far away from you — just as if she were dead. I should wager anything, that afflicted soul is hiding its sorrow. It must be so, or how could you explain the phenomenon of her constantly repeating the verse the old sailor used to recite at the time when she was happy? And why should she insist upon wearing that dress, which she ordered that same night when she became insane? I understand we cannot put much faith in these facts. Insanity is the most mysterious, impenetrable illness.

*Stephen (rising).*— Yet you speak as if you had penetrated it without finding obstacles.

*Valentine.*— I! —

*Stephen.*— You don't quite admit it, yet you feel you will be a comfort to her. Because you're convinced that in her own soul she still remembers

your devotion. So, besides having the opportunity of seeing her, you will have the privilege of being a comfort to her and the hope — no, I mean the certainty, of being her favorite. And this will make you proud, happy! —

*Valentine (excusing himself).*— But Stephen!

*Stephen.*— Let me say it! I envy you!

*Valentine.*— Please don't mortify me, remember I was your servant.

*Stephen.*— Yes, I envy you for what you will be tomorrow and for what you are now. You never had any ambition. You were deformed, yet you were satisfied; you were weak, yet you did not complain! You were my servant, yet you were contented. When you could speak to the woman who adored me, you were happy. And when later she became insane, you had the privilege of watching her through your window, while she was wandering in the garden, in that same spot, when formerly she had covered me with kisses. Indeed, you must feel as if you had realized your dreams and you have now your reward.

*Valentine (casting down his eyes).*

*Stephen.*— Ah! you cast down your eyes! You never thought that I would guess everything, and that I should honor you by spying upon your inner thoughts?

*Valentine.*— You had not the right to do that.

*Stephen.*— Why?

*Valentine.*— No, you had not the right to do that, because I am only a miserable creature, and you should not have been so cruel.

*Stephen.*— Ah! you are my rival!

*Valentine (quickly).*— You are a coward!

*Stephen.*— You dare to judge me, you who stand there waiting, watching for my departure in order to seize what belonged to me alone.

*Valentine.*— Don't torment me.

*Stephen.*— I curse you for all you have made me suffer and for all you have made me say. (*Covering his face with both hands, then controlling himself, goes to his desk.*)

*Valentine (does not move).*

## SCENE II

STEPHEN, VALENTINE, THERESA

(*Enter Theresa from right; she is dressed differently, but her hair is still hanging down and has some ornaments in it. She drags after her, with one hand, her favorite dress of the third act, and has on her shoulders laces and ribbons.*)

*Stephen (seeing her would like to hide himself).*

*Theresa (to Valentine).*— Did you see my new dress? Look, is it not beautiful?

*Valentine (trying not to look at her).*— Yes, yes I saw it, Madame Theresa.

*Theresa.*— And I am going to put on it all these ribbons and lace. But why don't you look at me.

‘Open your eyes, on the earth!’

*Stephen.*— No more, no more! (*Going to take his hat, which is on a chair.*)

*Valentine (going to him).*— Let me convince you. Don't be so obstinate.

*Stephen (stops).*

*Valentine.*— Because you are in despair, you're going to run after a woman whom you loathe. And when you realize your mistake it will be too late.

*Stephen.*— No.

*Valentine.*— All her money will disgust you.

*Stephen.*— No.

*Valentine.*— Remain here and let me go.

*Stephen.*— You!

*Theresa (has seated herself, in the meantime, on one of the boxes and is arranging her dress).*

*Valentine.*— Yes, yes I, the intruder! After the mortification you gave me I could not fulfil, what before, I called my duty and I could not even enjoy your money. You seem to be astonished. You are right, as I have never been proud! But, how funny! It came all at once! (*Taking out from his pocket the envelope, puts it on the desk.*)

*Stephen (gently).*— I beg of you to take back that money, which I owed you for your services. You see your pride should not be hurt, and then forgive the bitter words which I have just uttered! — I am going now.

*Valentine (sincerely).*— Can you not understand that you can save yourself only by remaining here?

*Stephen.*— You yourself said, ‘She seems so far away from you — just as if she were dead.’

*Valentine.*— Good souls, Stephen, sometimes leave this world, so as to influence us from a distance, to a better life, and we don't rebel as we did during their life.

*Stephen.*— No, it is not true! If I remain here I shall die of a broken heart (*embracing him*). Good by, Valentine.

*Valentine.*— Good by.

*Stephen (impulsively approaches Theresa).*

*Theresa (rising quickly).—* What do you want?

*Stephen (impulsively embraces her).—* I wish you would see that I am crying.

*(Exit quickly)*

### SCENE III

THERESA, VALENTINE

*Theresa (choosing a ribbon. The dress is lying on a box).*

*Valentine (after a second sits down).*

*Theresa (taking a ribbon, throws it into the air. Not succeeding in catching it, she utters a cry).—* Oh! *(to Valentine).* You *(pointing to the ribbon)*; help me!

*Valentine (rises, picks up the ribbon and returns it to Theresa, avoids looking at her).*

*Theresa (taking back the ribbon).—* Are you afraid of me?

*Valentine.—* No, Madame Theresa.

*Theresa.—* Do you hate me?

*Valentine.—* I am sorry you think that.

*Theresa.—* — I don't know who you are.

*Valentine.—* I am only a hunchback!

*Theresa.—* What else?

*Valentine.—* A parasite.

*Theresa.—* Why?

*Valentine.—* Because I make profit from other people's misfortune. I cannot deny that! He was right when he accused me. Yes, I even blushed. It seemed to me then that I should no longer have the courage to approach you — To speak to you — But now that I am sure no one is looking at me, that you cannot see me or hear me, I take advantage of my opportunity. Yes, I am near you. I am looking at you; I can speak to you, and this is my happiest moment. If you were not the victim of such a terrible misfortune I could not be here.

*Theresa.—* I am convinced we understand each other. Let us talk *(making him sit down)* — Sit here, and let us talk as if we were friends.

*Valentine.—* Yes, like two friends.

### SCENE IV

VALENTINE, THERESA, STEPHEN

*Stephen's voice (outside).—* Valentine! Valentine! —

*Valentine (rising quickly, as if afraid of being found with Theresa).—*  
Yes?—

*Stephen's voice.—* I am here, Valentine!

*Valentine (going to the door).*

*Theresa (rising quickly, picking up her dress).—* No, no! Don't let him come in; no don't! I am dressed like a servant—I must be dressed up to receive this gentleman.

*Valentine (remains on the threshold).*

*Stephen (enters and throws himself in Valentine's arms).*

*Theresa (hiding herself in a corner of the room).—* Send him away! Send him away!

(*A brief silence*)

*Stephen.—* I did not have the courage to do it.

*Valentine (taking his hat from him).*

*Stephen.—* To get away from here, I fought like a wild beast that tries to break the bars of his cage, and this terrible fight has exhausted me. I have no more strength. (*Exhausted falls onto sofa.*)

*Valentine.—* You've spent so many sleepless nights. Calm yourself, and tomorrow you will be strong again. No!—stronger than you have ever been.

*Stephen.—* If I could only hope so! — (*Sees Theresa hidden in a corner.*)

*Valentine.—* Call her.

*Stephen.—* She will not come to me.

*Valentine (going to her).—* Do you wish to speak with that gentleman?

*Theresa (pointing to her dress).—* What will he think of me!

*Valentine.—* Make some excuse.

*Theresa.—* How?

*Valentine (taking her by the hand, and bringing her to Stephen).—* Tell him you have another dress. Show it to him. You want to see the dress, don't you, Stephen?

*Stephen.—* Yes.

*Theresa (showing her dress).—* Do you like it?

*Stephen (sweetly).—* It is beautiful.

*Valentine.—* Sit next to him.

*Theresa (sitting near Stephen).*

*Valentine.—* Tell him that it is going to be more beautiful.

*Stephen.—* Yes, tell me everything.

*Theresa.—* I'll show it to you. (*Taking one ribbon and putting it on the lace.*)

*Valentine.—* I am going to my room now, Stephen.

*Stephen (to Theresa).—* There is a bad light here, you will spoil your eyes.

*Theresa (smiling).*— No.

*Valentine (exit to the left).*

*Stephen.*— Let us now rest together, and tomorrow we will both go back to our work — I shall be patient — like you, and you will advise me — give me the example. You shall be my ‘Virtue.’

*Theresa.*— I am too little — little —

*Stephen (repeating).*— Little — little (*timidly embraces her*).

*Theresa (not objecting to his embrace, and ceasing to work).*

*Stephen (embracing her and putting his head on her shoulder).*— So.

*Theresa.*— Why are you tired? — Did you walk much?

*Stephen.*— Yes.

*Theresa.*— Do you want to go to sleep?

*Stephen.*— Yes.

(*A brief silence*)

*Stephen (closing his eyes, murmurs).*— Little by little everything disappears. I only see you, as if you were my soul — I see you so quiet, so quiet — Ah! at last I can sleep!

(*A silence*)

(*Stephen sleeps*)

*Theresa (gently disengaging herself from his arms, then rises, letting her dress fall on him. Smiling, draws away back. All at once begins to repeat, in the same monotonous way the old man’s verse).*—

Over the sea — don’t look,

Close your eyes — and go on.

(*Exit to the terrace, her voice is heard from outside.*)—

There is a friend,— near by you

Close your eyes — and go on.

*Valentine’s voice (outside, in despair).*— Run, Stephen! Madame Theresa is standing on the parapet stretching her hands to the sea!

*Valentine (enters from left, runs to the terrace and exit).*

*Valentine (outside, utters a cry of terrible anguish).*

CURTAIN