

# FOUR FINAL PLAYS



**FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA**

**BLOOD WEDDING © YERMA  
THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA  
DOÑA ROSITA THE SPINSTER &  
THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS**

*Translated into English by  
A. S. KLINE*

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## ABOUT THIS WORK



Lorca wrote more than a dozen plays, of which these later four, created in the 1930's, are the best known and most popular. Written to support the 'theatre of social action', while travelling with a touring company through rural Spain, the plays employ simple but poetic language, strong passionate speech, and intense moments of action or emotion, to convey the claustrophobic life of the people. Lorca wrote: 'Theatre is a school of tears and laughter, a forum for liberty, where people can question obsolete or erroneous social norms, and explain through living characters the eternal modes of the human heart.' While exploring the stifling aspects of contemporary life for both the rural poor and the isolated individual, his plays also challenged the conventional roles of women in society, and allowed him to express, indirectly, his frustrations with attitudes to sexuality and homo-eroticism which affected him personally, and may have contributed to his subsequent persecution within Spain and his death.

# BLOOD WEDDING

*(BODAS DE SANGRE)*

*A tragedy in three acts and seven scenes – 1933*



*'The Reconciliation of the Montagues and the Capulets'*  
Frederic Leighton, 1830-1896, British  
The Yale Centre for British Art

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**CAST LIST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**

Bridegroom  
Mother of the Bridegroom  
Neighbour  
Mother-in-law of Leonardo  
Wife of Leonardo  
Leonardo  
Young Girl  
Maid to the Bride  
Father of the Bride  
Bride  
Wedding Guests  
Woodcutters  
Moon  
Death, as a Beggar-woman  
Girls from the village  
Women in mourning



## ACT I SCENE 1



*(A room painted yellow)*

**BRIDEGROOM:** *(entering)* Mother.

**MOTHER:** What?

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'm off.

**MOTHER:** Where to?

**BRIDEGROOM:** To the vineyard *(He makes as if to leave)*

**MOTHER:** Wait.

**BRIDEGROOM:** What is it?

**MOTHER:** Your lunch, my son.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Never mind. I'll eat grapes. Give me a knife.

**MOTHER:** And why?

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**BRIDEGROOM:** To cut them

**MOTHER:** (*muttering*) Knives, knives...Curse them all, and the wretch who invented them...

**BRIDEGROOM:** Let's change the subject.

**MOTHER:** And shotguns, and pistols, and little razors, and even hoes and winnowing hooks.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Fine.

**MOTHER:** Whatever can cut through a man's body, a lovely man, in the flower of his life, who is off to the vines or the olives, because they are his, his family's...

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Lowering his head*) You've missed the point.

**MOTHER:** ...and he doesn't return. Or if he does return it's so we can lay a palm leaf or a big plate of salt on him so the body won't swell. I don't know how you can carry a knife about you, or why I have these serpent's teeth in my kitchen.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Are you done yet?

**MOTHER:** If I lived a hundred years I could speak of nothing else. First, your father, who brought me the scent of carnations, and enjoyed me three short years, and then, your brother...is it right, is it possible that so small a thing as a pistol or a knife can do for a man, a bull of a man? I'll never be quiet. The months pass and pain still pricks my eyes, to the very roots of my hair.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Are we finished?

**MOTHER:** No. We are not finished. Can anyone give me back your father

or your brother? And they talk about prison. What is prison? They still eat there, they smoke; they play their instruments! My dead push up the grass, silently turning to dust; two who were like flowers...the killers, in prison, coolly gazing at the mountains...

**BRIDEGROOM:** Do you want me to kill them?

**MOTHER:** No...if you want to know, it's this...How can I not speak when you go through that door? It's this...I don't like you carrying a knife. It's this...I wish you wouldn't go to the fields.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Laughing*) Come now!

**MOTHER:** I wish you were a woman. You'd not go to the river now, and we would sit and sew.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Taking his mother's arm and laughing*) Mother, what if I took you with me to the vineyard?

**MOTHER:** What use is an old woman in a vineyard? Are you going to lay me down under the vines?

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Taking her in his arms*) Old, so old, so very old.

**MOTHER:** Your father would take me along. He was of the true race. Good blood. Your grandfather left offspring everywhere. That's what I love. Man, man, harvest, harvest.

**BRIDEGROOM:** And I, mother?

**MOTHER:** You, what?

**BRIDEGROOM:** Must I say it again?

**MOTHER:** (*Seriously*) Ah!

**BRIDEGROOM:** You think it's wrong?

Blood Wedding

**MOTHER:** No

**BRIDEGROOM:** Then...?

**MOTHER:** I just don't know. Suddenly, like this, it always takes me by surprise. I know she's a good girl. It's true isn't it? Well-behaved. Hard-working. She bakes her own bread, and sews her own skirts, yet I feel, when she's named, as if I'd been struck on the forehead with a stone.

**BRIDEGROOM:** That's foolish.

**MOTHER:** More than foolish. I'll be left alone. I only have you left, and I'm sad you are leaving.

**BRIDEGROOM:** But you'll come with us.

**MOTHER:** No. I can't leave your father and brother here alone...I must go and see them every morning, and if I went away, likely one of the Felix's would die, one of that family of killers, and they'd bury him beside them. And it must not be! That! It must not be! Because I'd dig them up with my nails and shatter them against the wall myself.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Emphatically*) Talk about something else.

**MOTHER:** Forgive me. (*Pause*) How long have you known her?

**BRIDEGROOM:** Three years. I can buy the vineyard now.

**MOTHER:** Three years. She had a fiancé, no?

**BRIDEGROOM:** I don't know. I think not. A girl needs to take a good look at the man she marries.

**MOTHER:** Yes? I looked at no one. I looked at your father, and when they

killed him I looked at the wall in front of me. One woman for one man,  
and that's it!

**BRIDEGROOM:** You know my girl is good.

**MOTHER:** No doubt. But I don't think I know who her mother was.

**BRIDEGROOM:** What does that matter?

**MOTHER:** (*Gazing at him*) Son.

**BRIDEGROOM:** What do you want?

**MOTHER:** It's true! You're right! When do you want me to ask them for  
her?

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Happily*) Is Sunday fine?

**MOTHER:** (*Gravely*) I'll take her the studded earrings, they're heirlooms, and  
you can buy for her...

**BRIDEGROOM:** You know best...

**MOTHER:** Buy her some embroidered silk stockings, and for yourself two  
suits...Three! You're all I have!

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'm off. Tomorrow I'll go see her.

**MOTHER:** Yes, yes; and then make me happy with six grandchildren, at the  
very least, now that your father's no longer here...

**BRIDEGROOM:** The first one is for you.

**MOTHER:** Yes, but have girls. So we can embroider and sew and be  
tranquil.

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'm sure you'll grow to like my bride.

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**MOTHER:** I'll like her. (*She goes to kiss him and draws back*) Go, you're too big for kisses. Give them to your wife. (*Pause.*) Once she is yours.

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'm going.

**MOTHER:** Dig over the field near the mill, you've been neglecting.

**BRIDEGROOM:** It's done!

**MOTHER:** Go with God. (*The Bridegroom leaves. The mother remains seated her back to the door. A Neighbour dressed in dark clothes, wearing a headscarf, appears in the doorway.*) Enter.

**NEIGHBOUR:** How are you?

**MOTHER:** As you see.

**NEIGHBOUR:** I was down at the shop and came to see you. We live so far apart...!

**MOTHER:** It's twenty years since I've been to the top of the street.

**NEIGHBOUR:** You're right.

**MOTHER:** You think so.

**NEIGHBOUR:** Things happen. Two days ago they brought my neighbour's son home with both his arms mangled by the harvester. (*She sits.*)

**MOTHER:** Rafael?

**NEIGHBOUR:** Yes. And what will he do now? I often think your boy and my boy are better where they are, asleep, and at rest, and not exposed to being made useless.

**MOTHER:** Hush. All that's just talk...there's no consolation.

**NEIGHBOUR:** Ay!

**MOTHER:** Ay! (*Pause*)

**NEIGHBOUR:** (*Sadly*). And your son?

**MOTHER:** He just went out.

**NEIGHBOUR:** At last he'll buy the vineyard!

**MOTHER:** He had luck.

**NEIGHBOUR:** Now he'll marry.

**MOTHER:** (*As though waking up and moving her chair closer to her neighbour's.*)  
Listen.

**NEIGHBOUR:** (*Confidingly*.) Tell me.

**MOTHER:** Do you know my son's fiancée?

**NEIGHBOUR:** A good girl!

**MOTHER:** Yes, but...

**NEIGHBOUR:** But you can't say anyone knows her well. She lives with her father, way off, miles from the nearest house. But she's a good girl. Accustomed to solitude.

**MOTHER:** And her mother?

**NEIGHBOUR:** Oh I knew her. Beautiful. Her face shone like a saint's; but she was not to my liking. She didn't love her husband.

**MOTHER:** (*Loudly*) Ah, the things people know!

**NEIGHBOUR:** Pardon me. I mean no offence; but it's true. Now, there was

Blood Wedding

no talk of whether she was a decent woman or not. There was nothing of that. She was proud.

**MOTHER:** Always the same!

**NEIGHBOUR:** Well, you asked me.

**MOTHER:** I wish no one knew anything about them, the living one or the dead one. That they were like two thistles, no one noticed, that pricked if anything came near.

**NEIGHBOUR:** You're right. Your son is a catch.

**MOTHER:** He is. Worth taking care of. I heard that the girl had a fiancé a while back.

**NEIGHBOUR:** She was about fifteen. He was married two years ago, to a cousin of hers in fact. Nobody remembers the betrothal.

**MOTHER:** How come you remember, then?

**NEIGHBOUR:** You asked me...!

**MOTHER:** Everyone wants to know about what affects them. Who was the boy?

**NEIGHBOUR:** Leonardo.

**MOTHER:** Which Leonardo?

**NEIGHBOUR:** Leonardo...of the Felix family.

**MOTHER:** (*Rising.*) A Felix!

**NEIGHBOUR:** Woman, what do you hold Leonardo guilty of? He was barely eight at the time of the troubles.

**MOTHER:** It's true...But I hear the name Felix (*angrily*) and that same Felix

fills my mouth with mud (*she spits*), and I have to spit it out, spit it out, or kill them all.

**NEIGHBOUR:** Be calm. What good does that do?

**MOTHER:** Nothing. But...you understand.

**NEIGHBOUR:** Don't stand in the way of your son's happiness. Say nothing to him. You are old. I, too. You and I must be silent.

**MOTHER:** I'm to say nothing.

**NEIGHBOUR:** (*Kissing her*) Nothing.

**MOTHER:** (*Calmly*) Things...!

**NEIGHBOUR:** I'm off: soon my men will be back from the fields.

**MOTHER:** See what a hot day it is.

**NEIGHBOUR:** The lads carrying water to the reapers are burnt black with it.

Farewell, my dear.

Farewell.

(*She walks towards stage left. Halfway across she stops and slowly blesses herself.*)

*Curtain*

ACT I SCENE 2



*(A room painted pink, full of copperware and flowers. In the centre a covered table. It is morning. Leonardo's mother-in-law is cradling a child. His wife, opposite her, is sewing.)*

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** A singing, child, a singing  
about the great stallion,  
who wouldn't drink the water,  
the water in its blackness,  
in among the branches.  
Where it finds the bridge,  
it hangs there, singing.  
Who knows what water is,  
my child,  
its tail waving,  
through the dark green chambers?

**WIFE:** *(Softly)* Sleep, my flower,  
the stallion won't drink.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Sleep, my rose,  
the stallion is crying.  
His legs are wounded,  
his mane is frozen,  
in his eyes,  
there's a blade of silver.  
They went to the river.  
Ay, how they went!  
Blood running,  
quicker than water.

**WIFE:** Sleep, my flower,  
the stallion won't drink.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Sleep, my rose,  
the stallion is crying.

**WIFE:** It would not touch  
the wet shore,  
his burning muzzle,  
silvered with flies.  
He would only neigh,  
to the harsh mountains,  
a weight of river, dead,  
against his throat.  
Ay, proud stallion  
that would not drink the water!  
Ay, pain of snowfall,  
stallion of daybreak!

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Do not come here! Wait,  
close the window,  
with branches of dream,  
and dreams of branches.

**WIFE:** My child is sleeping.

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**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** My child is silent.

**WIFE:** Stallion, my child  
has a soft pillow.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Steel for his cradle.

**WIFE:** Lace for his covers.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** A singing, child, a singing.

**WIFE:** Ay, proud stallion  
that wouldn't drink the water!

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Don't come here! Don't enter!  
Go up to the mountain  
through the sombre valley,  
to where the wild mare is.

**WIFE:** (*Gazing*) My child is sleeping.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** My child is resting.

**WIFE:** (*Softly*) Sleep, my flower,  
the stallion won't drink.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** (*Rising, and very softly*)  
Sleep, my rose,  
the stallion is crying.

*(They take the child into another room. Leonardo enters.)*

**LEONARDO:** And the child?

**WIFE:** Asleep.

**LEONARDO:** He has not been well. He cried all night.

**WIFE:** (*Cheerfully*) He's as fresh as a rose today. And you? Did you go to the blacksmith's?

**LEONARDO:** I've just come from there. I've been re-shoeing that horse for more than two months, and he's always casting one. They must catch on the stones.

**WIFE:** Could it be you ride him too hard?

**LEONARDO:** No. I barely ride him.

**WIFE:** Yesterday the neighbours said you were seen at the edge of the plain.

**LEONARDO:** Who said that?

**WIFE:** The women picking capers. It really surprised me. Was it you?

**LEONARDO:** No. What would I be doing in that wasteland?

**WIFE:** That's what I said. But the horse was soaked in sweat.

**LEONARDO:** You saw him?

**WIFE:** No. My mother did.

**LEONARDO:** Is she with the child?

**WIFE:** Yes. Would you like a drink of lemonade?

**LEONARDO:** With ice-cold water.

**WIFE:** You weren't home for lunch...!

**LEONARDO:** I was at the corn-factor's, weighing the wheat. There's always a delay.

**WIFE:** (*Preparing the drink, attentively*) And the price was good?

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**LEONARDO:** It was fair.

**WIFE:** I could do with a new dress; and the baby a cap with ribbons.

**LEONARDO:** (*Rising*) I'll go and look at him.

**WIFE:** Be careful, he's asleep.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** (*Entering*) So who's been racing that horse? It's down there, lathered, its eyes rolling in its head, as if it's come from the ends of the earth.

**LEONARDO:** (*Sourly*) Me.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** He's yours; forgive me.

**WIFE:** (*Timidly*) He was having the wheat weighed.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** He can go back there, as far as I'm concerned. (*She sits.*)

(*Pause*)

**WIFE:** Your drink. Is it cold enough?

**LEONARDO:** Yes.

**WIFE:** Have you heard my cousin's getting engaged?

**LEONARDO:** When?

**WIFE:** Tomorrow. The marriage will be in a month. I hope they'll invite us.

**LEONARDO:** (*Gravely*) I'm not sure.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** I don't think the mother's too satisfied with the marriage.

**LEONARDO:** And perhaps she's right. The girl's a worry.

**WIFE:** I don't like you both thinking ill of a good girl.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** But when he says so it's because he knows her. Wasn't she your girlfriend for three years or so? (*Pointedly*)

**LEONARDO:** But I finished with her. (*To his wife.*) Are you going to cry now? Stop that! (*He pulls her hands from her face brusquely.*) Let's go and see the child. (*They go out arm in arm.*)

(*A happy young girl appears. She enters running.*)

**GIRL:** Señora.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** What is it?

**GIRL:** The bridegroom's down at the shops, and he's buying the best of all they have.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** He's alone?

**GIRL:** No, with his mother. Very grave, very tall. (*She imitates her.*) But, what luxury!

**GIRL:** They've plenty of money.

**GIRL:** And they bought silk stockings! ...Ay, what stockings! Stockings girls dream about! You can see: a swallow here (*Showing her ankle*), a boat here (*Pointing to her calf*) and here, a rose. (*Pointing to her thigh*).

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Child!

**GIRL:** A rose with its pollen and stem! Ay! All in silk!

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** They'll unite two fine fortunes.

Blood Wedding

*(Leonardo and his wife return.)*

**GIRL:** I came to tell you what they've been buying.

**LEONARDO:** *(Sharply)* It doesn't matter to us.

**WIFE:** Leave her alone.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Leonardo, she didn't deserve that.

**GIRL:** I'm sorry. *(She exits, crying.)*

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Why do you have to be so unpleasant to people?

**LEONARDO:** I didn't ask for your opinion. *(He sits down.)*

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** That's fine.

*(Pause)*

**WIFE:** *(To Leonardo)* What's wrong? What ideas are milling around inside that head of yours? Don't push me off, so, knowing nothing...

**LEONARDO:** Leave me alone.

**WIFE:** No. I want you to look at me and tell me.

**LEONARDO:** I'm off. *(He rises.)*

**WIFE:** Where are you going?

**LEONARDO:** *(Bitterly)* Can't you be quiet?

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** *(Energetically, to her daughter)* Hush! *(Leonardo exits)* The child! *(She goes out and returns with him in her arms. The wife remains standing...motionless.)*

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** His legs are wounded,  
his mane is frozen,  
in his eyes,  
there's a blade of silver.  
They went to the river.  
Ay, how they went!  
Blood running,  
quicker than water.

**WIFE:** (*Turning about slowly as if dreaming.*)  
Sleep, my flower,  
the stallion's not drinking.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Sleep, my rose,  
the stallion is crying.

**WIFE:** A singing, child, a singing.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Ay! The great stallion,  
who wouldn't drink the water!

**WIFE:** (*Dramatically*)  
Don't come here! Don't enter!  
Go up to the mountain!  
Ay, pain of snowfall  
stallion of daybreak!

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** (*Weeping*)  
My child is sleeping...

**WIFE:** (*Weeping, and slowly drawing closer.*)  
My child is resting...

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** Sleep, my flower,  
the stallion won't drink.

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**WIFE:** (*Weeping and leaning over the table.*)

Sleep, my rose,  
the stallion is crying.

*Curtain*

### ACT I SCENE 3



*(Interior of the cave-house where the Bride lives. At the back, a cross of large pink flowers. The doors, curved archways, with lace hangings with pink ties. For the walls, a hard white material, curved fans, blue vases and small mirrors.)*

**MAID:** Enter... *(Very affable, full of hypocritical humility. The Bridegroom and his Mother enter. The Mother is wearing plain black, with a lace mantilla. The Bridegroom wears black corduroy with a large gold chain.)*

Would you like to sit? They'll be here in a moment. *(She goes out. The mother and son remain seated, motionless as statues. A long pause.)*

**MOTHER:** Did you bring your watch?

**BRIDEGROOM:** Yes. *(He takes it out and gazes at it.)*

**MOTHER:** We must leave in good time. What a distance these people live!

**BRIDEGROOM:** But their land is good.

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**MOTHER:** Good; but too remote. A four hour journey, and not a house or a tree.

**BRIDEGROOM:** These are the dry plains.

**MOTHER:** Your father would have covered it with trees.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Without water?

**MOTHER:** He'd have found some. The three years he was married to me, he planted ten cherry-trees. (*Recalling.*) The three walnut-trees by the mill, a whole vineyard, and an orpine, the one they call the Jupiter plant that has purple leaves, which dried up. (*Pause*)

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Referring to the Bride.*) She must be getting ready.

(*The Bride's father enters. He is an old man, with gleaming white hair. His head is slightly bowed. The Mother and the Bridegroom stand and shake hands with him silently.*)

**FATHER:** A long journey?

**MOTHER:** Four hours. (*They all sit.*)

**FATHER:** You must have come the long way round.

**MOTHER:** I'm too old now to come through the fields by the river.

**BRIDEGROOM:** It makes her ill. (*Pause*)

**FATHER:** A fine crop of grass this year.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Fine indeed.

**FATHER:** In my day, this land wouldn't yield grass. We had to labour over it and shed tears to get anything from it.

**MOTHER:** It does now. But don't worry. I've not come to ask for anything.

**FATHER:** (*Smiling.*) You're richer than I. Vineyards are worth a fortune. Each plant is like a silver coin. What I feel is that our fields...you understand...are too far apart. I like everything joined together. There's a thorn in my heart, a little plot that's a reproach in the middle of my fields, one that they won't sell me for all the gold in the world.

**BRIDEGROOM:** That's always the way.

**FATHER:** If we could harness twenty pair of oxen to drag your vineyards over here and lay them on a slope. What happiness...!

**MOTHER:** Why is that?

**FATHER:** What's mine is hers, and what's yours is his. That's why. To see it all joined together! Because to join things is beautiful!

**BRIDEGROOM:** It would be less work.

**MOTHER:** When I'm dead, you can sell, and buy over here.

**FATHER:** Sell! Sell! Bah! Buy, buy everything. If I'd had sons, I'd have bought everything from the mountains to the river. Because it's not such good land, but strong arms could make it good, and nobody comes by to steal your crops, and you can sleep peacefully. (*Pause.*)

**MOTHER:** You know why I've come.

**FATHER:** Yes.

**MOTHER:** Well?

**FATHER:** It seems fine to me. They've talked it over.

**MOTHER:** My son is fit and able.

**FATHER:** My daughter the same.

Blood Wedding

**MOTHER:** My son is handsome. He has never known a woman. His honour is brighter than a white sheet in the sun.

**FATHER:** What can I say of my girl? She's up at three with the morning star to make breakfast. Never speaks out; is as soft and gentle as wool; she embroiders all sorts of embroidery, and can cut a rope with her teeth.

**MOTHER:** God bless their house.

**FATHER:** May God bless it.

*(The Maid appears with two trays. One carrying glasses, the other sweetmeats.)*

**MOTHER:** *(To the son)* When do you want the wedding to be?

**BRIDEGROOM:** Next Thursday.

**FATHER:** The day when she'll be just twenty-two.

**MOTHER:** Twenty-two! That would have been my eldest son's age if he'd lived. He'd be alive, warm and vibrant as he was, if men had not invented knives.

**FATHER:** You shouldn't dwell on it.

**MOTHER:** Every minute. Hand on heart.

**FATHER:** Thursday then. Is that right?

**BRIDEGROOM:** That's right.

**FATHER:** We and the children will go to the church by car, as it's a fair distance, and the rest by carts and on horseback.

**MOTHER:** Agreed.

*(The Maid crosses the room.)*

**FATHER:** Tell her she can come in now. (*To the Mother*) I'm sure you'll like her.

(*The Bride appears. Her hands are folded modestly and her head is bowed.*)

**MOTHER:** Come to me. Are you happy?

**BRIDE:** Yes, señora.

**FATHER:** You shouldn't look so serious. After all in the end she will be a mother to you.

**BRIDE:** I am happy. Why I said so, is because I want to be married.

**MOTHER:** Naturally. (*Taking her by the chin.*) Look at me.

**FATHER:** She's the image of my wife.

**MOTHER:** Yes? What lovely eyes! Do you know what marriage is, little one?

**BRIDE:** (*Serious*) I know.

**MOTHER:** It's a man, and children, and a two foot thick wall against all the rest.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Is anything more required?

**MOTHER:** No. How happy you'll be! How happy!

**BRIDE:** I know my duty.

**MOTHER:** Here are some presents.

**BRIDE:** Thank you.

**FATHER:** You'll take something?

Blood Wedding

**MOTHER:** Not for me. (*To the son.*) And you?

**BRIDEGROOM:** I will. (*He eats a sweetmeat. The Bride also eats.*)

**FATHER:** (*To the Bridegroom.*) A glass of wine?

**MOTHER:** He never touches it.

**FATHER:** All the better!

(*Pause. They are all standing.*)

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*To the Bride*) I'll come tomorrow.

**BRIDE:** At what time?

**BRIDEGROOM:** At five.

**BRIDE:** I'll be waiting for you.

**BRIDEGROOM:** When I have to leave you I feel a great chill and a sort of knot in my throat.

**BRIDE:** When you're my husband you won't feel so.

**BRIDEGROOM:** That's so.

**MOTHER:** We must go. The sun won't wait. (*To the Father*) All agreed?

**FATHER:** Agreed.

**MOTHER:** (*To the Maid*) Farewell.

**MAID:** God go with you.

(*The Mother kisses the Bride, and they prepare to leave in silence.*)

**MOTHER:** (*In the doorway*) Goodbye, daughter. (*The Bride answers with a wave of her hand.*)

**FATHER:** I'll see you out. (*They leave.*)

**MAID:** I'm longing to see the presents.

**BRIDE:** (*Sharply*) Leave them be.

**MAID:** Ay, child, show me!

**BRIDE:** I don't wish to.

**MAID:** The stockings, at least. They say they're embroidered silk, woman!

**BRIDE:** I said no!

**MAID:** For heaven's sake. Oh, well. It seems you don't want marriage gifts.

**BRIDE:** (*Biting her hand, in pain.*) Ay!

**MAID:** Child, what's wrong? Do you think your reign is over? Don't think sour thoughts. Where's the need? None at all. Let's see the presents. (*She shakes the box.*)

**BRIDE:** (*Catching at her wrists.*) Leave them alone.

**MAID:** Ay, woman!

**BRIDE:** Leave them, I said.

**MAID:** You're stronger than a man.

**BRIDE:** Haven't I done a man's work? If only I were one!

**MAID:** Don't talk like this.

Blood Wedding

**BRIDE:** Hush. We'll speak of something else.

*(The light fades from the scene. A long pause.)*

**MAID:** Did you hear a horse in the night?

**BRIDE:** What time?

**MAID:** At three.

**BRIDE:** It must have been a horse that strayed from the herd.

**MAID:** No. It carried a rider.

**BRIDE:** How do you know?

**MAID:** Because I saw him. He stopped by your window. I was startled.

**BRIDE:** Was it my fiancé? He passes by at that hour sometimes.

**MAID:** No.

**BRIDE:** You saw him?

**MAID:** Yes.

**BRIDE:** Who was it?

**MAID:** It was Leonardo.

**BRIDE:** *(Sharply)* Liar! Liar! Liar! What would he come here for?

**MAID:** Wine.

**BRIDE:** Silence! Damn your tongue! *(The sound of a horse is heard.)*

**MAID:** *(At the window.)* Look, Lean out. Was that him?

**BRIDE:** It was!

*The Curtain falls quickly.*

## ACT II SCENE 1

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*(The hallway of the Bride's house. The doorway is at the back. It is night. The Bride appears wearing a white petticoat heavy with lace and embroidery, and a white bodice. Her arms are bare. The Maid is similarly dressed.)*

**MAID:** I'll finish doing your hair here.

**BRIDE:** I can't stand it inside, it's so hot.

**MAID:** In this place it's not even cool at dawn.

*(The Bride sits on a low chair and gazes at herself in a hand mirror. The Maid combs the Bride's hair.)*

**BRIDE:** My mother came from a place where there were many trees. Rich land.

**MAID:** She was so full of life!

**BRIDE:** But she wasted away here.

**MAID:** Her fate.

**BRIDE:** As we all waste away. Even the walls are on fire. Ay! Don't tug so hard.

**MAID:** It's so I can get this wave right. I want it to fall over your brow. (*The Bride gazes at herself in the mirror.*) You're so beautiful! Ay! (*She kisses her passionately.*)

**BRIDE:** (*Gravely*) Finish my hair.

**MAID:** (*Combing her hair*) You're fortunate. You're going to embrace a man, and kiss him, and feel his weight!

**BRIDE:** Hush.

**MAID:** And the best is when you wake and feel him beside you, and his breath brushes your shoulders, like a nightingale's feather.

**BRIDE:** (*Sharply*) Will you hush?

**MAID:** But, child! A marriage. What else is it? A marriage is such and nothing more. Is it sweetmeats? Is it sprays of flowers? No. It's a shining bed and a man and a woman.

**BRIDE:** You shouldn't say it.

**MAID:** Perhaps not. But that's the true joy of it.

**BRIDE:** Or the true bitterness.

**MAID:** I'm going to place the orange-blossom here, so that the garland sets off your hair. (*She tries out a spray of orange-blossom.*)

**BRIDE:** (*Gazing at herself in the mirror.*) Give it me. (*She takes the orange-blossom and looks at it and lowers her head disconsolately.*)

Blood Wedding

**MAID:** What's this?

**BRIDE:** Leave me alone.

**MAID:** This is no time for sadness. (*Animatedly*) Give me the blossom. (*The Bride throws it to the floor.*) Child! That's tempting fate, throwing your garland on the ground. Raise your head! Don't you want to be married? Speak. You can still say no. (*She rises.*)

**BRIDE:** It's clouded. An ill wind at the heart of it: who does not feel it?

**MAID:** You love your man.

**BRIDE:** I love him.

**MAID:** Yes, yes, it's true.

**BRIDE:** But it's such a huge step.

**MAID:** You have to take it.

**BRIDE:** I've promised I would.

**MAID:** I'll fix your garland for you.

**BRIDE:** (*Sitting down*) Make haste, because they'll soon be here.

**MAID:** They've been on the road two hours already.

**BRIDE:** How far from here to the church?

**MAID:** Two miles by the river bank, double that if you go by the road.

(*The Bride rises and the Maid gazes at her admiringly.*)

**MAID:** Let the bride wake  
on her wedding day.  
Let the world's rivers  
carry her garland!

**BRIDE:** (*Smiling*) Let us go.

**MAID:** (*Kissing her warmly and dancing round her.*)  
Let her awake  
beneath the green branch  
of flowering laurel.  
Let her wake  
to the branch and spray  
of the laurel flowers!

(*A loud knocking is heard.*)

**BRIDE:** Open the door! It must be the first guests.

(*She goes inside. The Maid opens the door and expresses surprise.*)

**MAID:** You?

**LEONARDO:** Yes. Good morning.

**MAID:** The first!

**LEONARDO:** Was I not invited?

**MAID:** Yes.

**LEONARDO:** So I came.

**MAID:** And your wife?

**LEONARDO:** I am on horseback. She's coming by road.

Blood Wedding

**MAID:** And you didn't meet up with anyone?

**LEONARDO:** I overtook them.

**MAID:** You'll kill that beast, over-riding it.

**LEONARDO:** When it's dead, it's dead! (*Pause*)

**MAID:** Sit down. Nobody's about yet.

**LEONARDO:** And the bride?

**MAID:** I'm going to dress her myself, now.

**LEONARDO:** The bride! She must be happy!

**MAID:** (*Changing the subject*) And the child?

**LEONARDO:** What child?

**MAID:** Your son.

**LEONARDO:** (*Recalling himself as if from a trance*) Ah!

**MAID:** Are they bringing him?

**LEONARDO:** No.

(*A pause. The sound of singing far off.*)

**MAID:** Let the bride wake  
on her wedding day.

**LEONARDO:** Let the bride wake  
on her wedding day.

**MAID:** There they are. But they've still a way to come.

**LEONARDO:** (*Rising*) The bride will wear a large garland, no? It shouldn't be too large. A little one would suit her much better. And has the bridegroom brought orange-blossom yet, for her corsage?

**BRIDE:** (*Appearing in her petticoat and wearing the garland of orange-blossom*) He has brought it.

**MAID:** (*Sharply*) You mustn't show yourself like that.

**BRIDE:** Why not? (*Gravely*) Why did you ask if he'd brought the orange-blossom? Have you a reason?

**LEONARDO:** None. What reason should I have? (*Approaching her*) You, who know me, know I've no reason. Tell me, then. What did I mean to you? Try exercising your memory. Oh, a pair of oxen and a miserable shack weren't enough for you. That's the trouble.

**BRIDE:** Why are you here?

**LEONARDO:** To witness your marriage?

**BRIDE:** Just as I witnessed yours!

**LEONARDO:** Forced to it by you, tied by both hands. They may kill me, but now they daren't show me contempt. Though with their silver, that shines so bright, they show contempt for everyone.

**BRIDE:** That's a lie!

**LEONARDO:** I don't want to discuss it, because I'm a hot-blooded man, and I don't want the whole place to hear my voice.

**BRIDE:** I can shout louder.

**LEONARDO:** It's pointless. You can't have what's gone. (*The bride looks at the door, full of anxiety.*)

Blood Wedding

**BRIDE:** You're right. I shouldn't even be speaking to you. But my spirit's angered that you've come to spy on me at my wedding and deliberately ask about the orange-blossom. Go and wait for your wife, outside.

**LEONARDO:** Can't you and I even speak to one another?

**MAID:** (*Angrily*) No you can't.

**LEONARDO:** After my marriage I thought, day and night, about who was to blame, and every time I thought about it the guilty one altered; for there's always a guilty party!

**BRIDE:** A man on horseback can go anywhere, and knows how to put pressure on a woman lost in a wasteland. But I have my pride. This is my wedding. And I'll lock myself away with my husband, whom I must love above all other things.

**LEONARDO:** Pride won't serve you. (*He draws nearer.*)

**BRIDE:** Don't come near me!

**LEONARDO:** To be silent and consumed by fire is the worst punishment on earth, of those we inflict on ourselves. What use was pride to me, not seeing you, and you alone, lying there night after night? None at all! It served to stoke the flames higher! Because one thinks time is a cure, and the walls will shut things out, and it's not true, it's not true. When flames reach the heart, they can't be quenched!

**BRIDE:** (*Trembling*) I must *not* listen to you. I must *not* hear your voice. It's as though I drank a bottle of something sweet and lay on a carpet of roses. And I'm dragged down, and know I'm drowning, but I slip backwards.

**MAID:** (*Seizing Leonardo by the lapels*) You must leave, right now!

**LEONARDO:** This is the last time I'll speak to her. Don't you worry.

**BRIDE:** I know it's madness, and I know it causes me pain deep in my heart, and here I am listening meekly, watching him throw his arms about.

**LEONARDO:** No peace until I've said the words. *I married.* Now *you* marry.

**MAID:** *(To Leonardo)* And she *will* be married!

**VOICES:** *(Singing, drawing closer)*

Let the bride wake  
on her wedding day.

**BRIDE:** Let the bride wake! *(She runs off to her room)*

**MAID:** There they are now. *(To Leonardo)* Don't you come near her again.

**LEONARDO:** Don't worry. *(He exits stage left.)*

*(It is daybreak.)*

**A GIRL:** Let the bride wake  
on her wedding day;  
let the wheel turn,  
our garlands display.

**VOICES:** Let the bride wake!

**MAID:** *(Animated)* Let her awake  
beneath the green branch  
of love in flower.  
Let her wake to the branch and the spray  
of the laurel!

**SECOND GIRL:** (*Entering*)

Let her awake  
with floating hair,  
a singlet of snow,  
shoes gleaming with silver,  
and on her brow jasmine.

**MAID:** Ay, the sweet girl  
while the moon shines!

**FIRST GIRL:** Ay, now her lover  
comes to the olive-grove!

**A BOY:** (*Entering, with his sombrero held high*)

Let the bride wake,  
let her wedding spill  
out over the fields,  
with dishes of flowers,  
and loaves of delight.

**VOICES:** Let the bride wake!

**SECOND GIRL:** The bride  
has put on her white garland,  
the bridegroom  
ties on her ribbons of gold.

**MAID:** For a lemon grove  
the bride shall not sleep.

**THIRD GIRL:** (*Entering*)  
For an orange grove  
the bridegroom brings silver and cloth.

(*Three guests enter*)

**FIRST BOY:** Let the dove wake!

Dawn clears  
the fields of shadow.

**FIRST GUEST:** The bride, the white bride,  
a maiden today,  
tomorrow a wife.

**FIRST GIRL:** Come, dark-haired girl  
with your silken train.

**SECOND GUEST:** Come little dark one,  
let the chill dawn rain dew.

**FIRST BOY:** Awake, bride, awake  
blossom fills the air.

**MAID:** A tree I'd embroider  
with gems and ribbons  
and love in each gem  
with joy all around.

**VOICES:** Let the bride wake!

**FIRST BOY:** The wedding is come!

**THIRD GUEST:** The wedding is come,  
when you will love,  
come, flower of the mountains  
the captain's daughter.

**FATHER:** (*Entering*)  
The captain's daughter  
I give to the bridegroom.  
Here he comes with oxen as dowry!

Blood Wedding

**THIRD GIRL:** The bridegroom seems  
a flower of the sun.  
Under his feet  
carnations are springing.

**MAID:** Oh, my fortunate child!

**SECOND BOY:** Let the bride awake.

**MAID:** Oh, and her lover!

**FIRST GIRL:** The wedding bells ring  
on the morning breeze.

**SECOND GIRL:** Let the bride come forth.

**FIRST GIRL:** Let her come, let her come!

**MAID:** Let the bells peal  
Let the bells ring!

**FIRST BOY:** Forth she comes! Now she is here!

**MAID:** Like a bull  
the marriage is risen!

*(The bride appears. She is wearing a black dress, of around 1900, tight at the hips, with a long train with gauzy pleats and stiff lace. On top of her hair rests a garland of orange-blossom. Guitars sound. The girls kiss the bride.)*

**THIRD GIRL:** What have you perfumed your hair with?

**BRIDE:** *(Laughing)* Nothing at all.

**SECOND GIRL:** *(Gazing at the dress)* That material is something special.

**FIRST BOY:** Here is the groom!

**BRIDEGROOM:** Good health to all!

**FIRST GIRL:** *(Placing a flower behind his ear.)*

The bridegroom seems  
a flower of the sun.

**SECOND GIRL:** Calm breezes  
flow from his eyes.

*(The groom goes to stand beside the bride.)*

**BRIDE:** Why are you wearing those shoes?

**BRIDEGROOM:** They're shinier than the black ones.

**LEONARDO'S WIFE:** *(Entering and kissing the bride.)*

Bless you both. *(They talk together animatedly.)*

**LEONARDO:** *(Entering like someone performing a chore.)*

This day of the wedding,  
we garland your brow.

**WIFE:** So the country is bright  
with your river of hair.

**MOTHER:** *(To the father.)* Why are those two here?

**FATHER:** They're family. Today is a day of forgiveness!

**MOTHER:** I'll tolerate it, but I don't forgive.

**BRIDEGROOM:** How the garland brings a glow to you!

**BRIDE:** Let's go quickly to the church!

**BRIDEGROOM:** You're in a hurry?

Blood Wedding

**BRIDE:** Yes. I want to be your wife, and be alone with you, and hear no voice but yours.

**BRIDEGROOM:** I want that too!

**BRIDE:** And I only want to see your eyes. And for you to hold me so tight that even if my mother, my dead mother, called me, I could not break free of you.

**BRIDEGROOM:** My arms are strong. I'm going to hold you for the next forty years.

**BRIDE:** (*Dramatically, taking his arm.*) Forever!

**FATHER:** Quickly now! Bring the horses, and the carts! The sun's already risen.

**MOTHER:** Take care! Let's not bring ill on the day.

(*The large door at the back opens. They begin to leave.*)

**MAID:** Leaving your house,  
young girl so white  
you seem to sail  
like a star through the air.

**FIRST GIRL:** Pure in body and soul,  
leaving your house, to be wed.

(*They prepare to leave.*)

**SECOND GIRL:** Now you leave your house  
to pass to the church!

**MAID:** The breeze strews  
flowers on the sand.

**THIRD GIRL:** Ay! The white bride!

**MAID:** A dark breeze  
the lace of her veil.

*(They leave. The sound of guitars, wooden triangles and tambourines. Leonardo and his wife remain, alone.)*

**WIFE:** Let's go.

**LEONARDO:** Where?

**WIFE:** To the church. But don't ride there. Come with me.

**LEONARDO:** In the cart?

**WIFE:** How else?

**LEONARDO:** I'm not the man to go by cart.

**WIFE:** And I'm not the woman to go to a wedding without my husband. I can't take much more!

**LEONARDO:** Me neither!

**WIFE:** Why do you look at me like that? With daggers in your eyes.

**LEONARDO:** Let's go!

**WIFE:** I don't know what's happening. But I think, and don't wish to think. I know one thing. It's over already. And I have a child. And another on the way. Let's go you say. The same fate overtook my mother. But I'm not moving from here.

*(There are voices.)*

Blood Wedding

**VOICES:** Leaving your house,  
to go to the church  
you seem to sail  
like a star through the air!

**WIFE:** (*Weeping*) You seem to sail  
like a star through the air!  
I flew from my house too, just like that.  
With the whole world before me.

**LEONARDO:** (*Rising.*) Let's go.

**WIFE:** But together!

**LEONARDO:** Yes. (*Pause.*) Come on! (*They leave.*)

**VOICES:** Leaving your house,  
young girl so white  
you seem to sail  
like a star through the air.

*The Curtain falls slowly*

## ACT II SCENE 2



*(Exterior of the Bride's house. An atmosphere of grey-whites and cold blues. Large cacti. Everything sombre and silvery. A panorama of brownish plateaux, hardened, as though they formed a country moulded in ceramics.)*

**MAID:** *(Arranging glasses and trays on a table)*

Turning,  
the wheel, turning  
and the water passing by,  
as the wedding day arrives,  
parting the branches,  
and the moon gleaming  
on the white verandah.

*(In a loud voice)* Lay out those tablecloths!

Blood Wedding

*(In a voice full of pathos)*

Singing,  
the lovers, singing  
and the water passing by,  
as the wedding day arrives,  
glowing with the frost  
and coated with the honey  
of the bitter almond-trees.

*(In a loud voice)* Get the wine ready!

*(In a voice full of pathos)*

Lover,  
lover of the earth.  
Watch the water passing  
as your wedding-day arrives.  
Gather up your skirts  
beneath your husband's wing,  
and go from your house.  
For the bridegroom is a dove  
with his breast on fire  
and the fields wait the news  
of blood being shed.  
Turning,  
the wheel, turning  
and the water passing by.  
Now the wedding day arrives,  
let the water glow!

**MOTHER:** *(Entering)* At last!

**FATHER:** Are we the first to return?

**MOTHER:** No. Leonardo arrived, a few minutes ago, with his wife. He drove like a demon. His wife nearly died of fright. He travelled the road as though he was galloping it on horseback.

**FATHER:** He's looking for trouble. Only bad blood there.

**MOTHER:** What kind of blood do you expect? His whole family has it. It's from his great-grandfather, who began their murderous ways, and the rest of the evil race inherited it, with their knives and their false smiles.

**FATHER:** Forget about all that!

**MAID:** How can she forget about it?

**MOTHER:** I grieve to the depths of my being. When I'm confronted with them, I only see the hand that murdered my loved ones. Do you see me? Am I mad? Well, it is madness not to have screamed out all that my heart should utter. There's a cry in my heart every moment, against the ones who should be punished, and wrapped in their shrouds. But they leave me with my dead and I have to be silent. Then people *criticise*. (*She takes off her shawl*)

**FATHER:** This isn't the day to raise such things.

**MOTHER:** When the conversation runs that way, I have to speak out. And today above all. Because now there'll be no one left in the house but me.

**FATHER:** Hoping for fresh company.

**MOTHER:** That's my dream. Grandchildren. (*They sit down*.)

**FATHER:** I hope they have plenty. This land needs unpaid labour. They must wage war on the weeds, the thistles, the stones that emerge from nowhere. And that labour must come from the owners, to punish and tame it, and sow the seed. They need a host of sons.

**MOTHER:** And daughters! Men are creatures who pass on the wind! They're forced always to deal with weapons. Girls need never set foot in the street.

**FATHER:** (*Cheerfully*) I'm sure they'll have both.

Blood Wedding

**MOTHER:** My son will do well by her. He's from good stock. My father could have had many sons with me.

**FATHER:** What I wish is that the thing could be done in a day. That they could produce two or three full-grown men straight away.

**MOTHER:** But it's not like that. It's so slow. That's why it's so terrible to see the blood of a single one spilt on the ground. A fountain that spurts for a moment and has cost years of our life. When I reached my son, he was lying in the middle of the street. I moistened my hand with blood, and tasted it with my tongue. Because it was mine. You don't know what that means. In a monstrance, of crystal and topaz, I would place that earth soaked with blood.

**FATHER:** Well, we must wait. My daughter is broad-hipped and your son is strong.

**MOTHER:** I trust so. (*They rise.*)

**FATHER:** Prepare the trays of food.

**MAID:** It's done.

**LEONARDO'S WIFE:** (*Entering*) I hope all will go well!

**MOTHER:** Thank you.

**LEONARDO:** Are you having a feast?

**FATHER:** Not much of one. People can't stay long.

**MAID:** Here they come, now!

(*Guests enter in cheerful groups. The newly-weds enter arm in arm. Leonardo leaves.*)

**BRIDEGROOM:** I've never seen so many people at a wedding.

**BRIDE:** (*Sombrely*) Never.

**FATHER:** It's splendid.

**MOTHER:** Entire families have come.

**BRIDEGROOM:** People who never leave their homes.

**MOTHER:** Your father sowed, and you are reaping the harvest.

**BRIDEGROOM:** There are cousins of mine I've never met before.

**MOTHER:** All the ones from the coast.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Smiling*) They were nervous at handling the horses. (*They talk.*)

**MOTHER:** (*To the bride*) What are you thinking about?

**BRIDE:** I'm not thinking of anything.

**MOTHER:** So many blessings can weigh heavy. (*Guitars are heard*)

**BRIDE:** As lead.

**MOTHER:** (*Forcefully*) Ignore their weight. You should be light as a dove.

**BRIDE:** Will you stay here tonight?

**MOTHER:** No. My house is empty.

**BRIDE:** You should stay.

**FATHER:** (*To the mother*) Look at the dance they're performing. A dance from the shores of the sea.

(*Leonardo appears and sits down. His wife stands behind him, looking tense.*)

Blood Wedding

**MOTHER:** They're my husband's cousins. Good for ever when there's dancing.

**FATHER:** It's good to see them. Something new for this house! (*He goes out*)

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*To the bride*) You liked the orange-blossoms?

**BRIDE:** (*Gazing at him*) Yes.

**BRIDEGROOM:** They're real wax. They'll last forever. I'd have liked to cover your whole dress with them.

**BRIDE:** There was no need.

(*Leonardo exits silently stage right.*)

**FIRST GIRL:** Let's go and unpin your veil.

**BRIDE:** (*To the bridegroom*) I'll be back soon.

**WIFE:** May you be happy with my cousin!

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'm sure I will.

**WIFE:** Just the two of you, here, not going far, creating a home. If only I too lived out here.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Why not buy some fields? Hill land is cheap, and it's healthier for raising children.

**WIFE:** We've no money. And the way we're going!

**BRIDEGROOM:** Your husband is a good worker.

**WIFE:** Yes, but he likes to chop and change too much. Flitting from one thing to another. He's not steady.

**MAID:** You're not eating? I'll go and wrap some wine-cakes for your mother, she loves them.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Give her three dozen.

**WIFE:** No, no. A few will be enough.

**BRIDEGROOM:** It's a special day.

**WIFE:** *(To the maid)* And Leonardo?

**MAID:** I've not seen him.

**BRIDEGROOM:** He must be with the rest, outside.

**WIFE:** I'll go and see. *(She leaves)*

**MAID:** It's all beautiful.

**BRIDEGROOM:** You're not dancing?

**MAID:** No one has asked me.

*(Two girls pass by behind them, during the whole scene there is a constant movement to and fro of characters.)*

**BRIDEGROOM:** *(Cheerfully)* They don't know any better. Lively elders dance better than the young.

**MAID:** So, you're full of compliments, young man? What a family yours is! Men amongst men! When I was a little girl I was at your grandfather's wedding. What a presence! It was as if a mountain was getting married!

**BRIDEGROOM:** I haven't quite the same stature.

**MAID:** But you've the same gleam in your eye. Where's the little one?

Blood Wedding

**BRIDEGROOM:** Taking off her veil.

**MAID:** Oh! Look. Since you won't be asleep by midnight, I've prepared some ham and a couple of glasses of good wine. On the lower shelf of the larder. If you need them.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Smiling*) I never eat late at night.

**MAID:** (*Maliciously*) If not you, then the bride. (*She leaves*)

**FIRST BOY:** (*Entering*) Come and drink with us!

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'm waiting for the bride.

**SECOND BOY:** She'll still be here at dawn.

**FIRST BOY:** Which is when it's nicest.

**SECOND BOY:** Just one, now.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Let's go.

*(They leave. Sounds of merriment. The bride enters. Two girls run from the opposite side to greet her.)*

**FIRST GIRL:** Who did you give the first pin to, me or her?

**BRIDE:** I'm not sure.

**FIRST GIRL:** You gave it to me, right here.

**SECOND GIRL:** No, to me in front of the altar.

**BRIDE:** (*Troubled by some internal struggle*) I don't know.

**FIRST GIRL:** It's just that I'd like you to...

**BRIDE:** It doesn't concern me. I've too much to think of.

**SECOND GIRL:** Forgive us.

*(Leonardo crosses the scene in the background)*

**BRIDE:** *(Seeing Leonardo)* And I'm preoccupied right now.

**FIRST GIRL:** We didn't know!

**BRIDE:** You will when your turn arrives. These things are serious.

**FIRST GIRL:** You're unhappy?

**BRIDE:** No. Forgive me.

**SECOND GIRL:** For what? But either pin means one will be married doesn't it?

**BRIDE:** Either.

**FIRST GIRL:** It's just that one of us will marry before the other.

**BRIDE:** Do you wish to so much?

**SECOND GIRL:** *(Shyly)* Yes.

**BRIDE:** But why?

**FIRST GIRL:** Because... *(Hugging her friend)*

*(Both run off. The bridegroom appears and slowly embraces the bride from behind.)*

**BRIDE:** *(Startled)* Don't do that!

**BRIDEGROOM:** Are you frightened of me?

**BRIDE:** Ay! It's you.

Blood Wedding

**BRIDEGROOM:** Who else would it be? *(Pause)* Your father, or me.

**BRIDE:** That's true!

**BRIDEGROOM:** Except that your father would have embraced you more gently.

**BRIDE:** *(Gravely)* That's for certain!

**BRIDEGROOM:** Because he's old. *(He embraces her firmly and a little roughly)*

**BRIDE:** *(Curtly)* Don't!

**BRIDEGROOM:** Why not? *(He releases her.)*

**BRIDE:** Because...of all the guests. Someone might come in.

*(The Maid crosses in the background without looking at them.)*

**BRIDEGROOM:** Why not? It's sanctioned.

**BRIDE:** Yes. But wait...later.

**BRIDEGROOM:** What's wrong? You seem troubled!

**BRIDE:** It's nothing. Don't leave me.

*(Leonardo's wife appears)*

**WIFE:** I didn't mean to interrupt...

**BRIDEGROOM:** Yes?

**WIFE:** Has my husband been here?

**BRIDEGROOM:** No.

**WIFE:** It's just that I can't find him and his horse is not in the stable.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Cheerfully*) He'll have taken it for a gallop.

(*The Wife leaves, looking anxious. The Maid enters.*)

**MAID:** Are you happy with it all?

**BRIDEGROOM:** I wish it was over. The Bride is a little tired.

**MAID:** What is it, child?

**BRIDE:** It's like a throbbing in my head.

**MAID:** A bride from these hills needs to be tougher than that. (*To the Bridegroom*) You're the one to cure it, now she's yours. (*She hurries out.*)

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Embracing the Bride*) Let's go and dance. (*He kisses her.*)

**BRIDE:** (*Distressed*) No. I want to lie down for a while.

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'll keep you company.

**BRIDE:** What! With all the guests still here? What would they say? Let me just be quiet for a while.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Whatever you wish! But don't let it take all night!

**BRIDE:** (*From the doorway*) I'll be fine later.

**BRIDEGROOM:** I hope so!

(*The Mother enters*)

**MOTHER:** My son.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Where have you been?

Blood Wedding

**MOTHER:** Wandering about here and there? Are you pleased?

**BRIDEGROOM:** Yes.

**MOTHER:** And your wife?

**BRIDEGROOM:** A bit upset. It's a difficult day for brides!

**MOTHER:** A difficult day? It's the best one of all. For me it was like coming into an inheritance. (*The Maid enters and goes towards the bride's room*) It's like ploughing the fresh earth, and planting new crops.

**BRIDEGROOM:** You are leaving?

**MOTHER:** Yes. I need to be home.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Alone?

**MOTHER:** Alone. No. My head is full of thoughts: of men and conflict.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Conflict that is no longer conflict, though.

(*The Maid enters swiftly and disappears hastily in the background.*)

**MOTHER:** That's what life is, conflict.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Whatever you say!

**MOTHER:** Try to be affectionate towards your wife. But if she gets a bit above herself, or turns awkward, give her a caress that hurts a little, a bite, and then follow it with a gentle kiss. She won't be upset, because she'll know you're a man, her master, who gives the orders. I learnt that from your father. And as he's no longer here, I must teach you how to be firm with her.

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'll do just as you say.

**FATHER:** (*Entering*) My daughter?

**BRIDEGROOM:** She went in.

**FIRST GIRL:** We want the newly-weds. We're having a round dance!

**FIRST BOY:** (*To the Bridegroom*) You're to lead off.

**FATHER:** (*Re-appearing*) She's not there!

**BRIDEGROOM:** No?

**FATHER:** She must have gone up to the verandah.

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'll go and see. (*He exits.*)

(*The sound of guitars and merriment.*)

**FIRST GIRL:** They're off! (*She leaves.*)

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Returning*) She's not there.

**MOTHER:** (*Anxiously*) No?

**FATHER:** Where can she have gone?

**MOTHER:** (*Anxiously*) No?

**MAID:** (*Entering*) And the little one. Where is she?

**MOTHER:** (*Gravely*) We don't know.

(*The Bridegroom exits. Three guests enter.*)

**FATHER:** (*Dramatically*) She's not dancing?

**MAID:** There's no sign of her, there.

Blood Wedding

**FATHER:** (*Excitedly*) There's a crowd in there. Go and look hard!

**MAID:** I have looked hard!

**FATHER:** (*Tragically*) Where can she be?

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Returning*) Nothing. She's nowhere to be found.

**MOTHER:** (*To the Father*) What is all this? Where *is* your daughter?

(*Leonardo's wife enters.*)

**WIFE:** They've fled! They've fled, she and and Leonardo. On his horse. She was holding him tight: they went past like the wind.

**FATHER:** That's not true! No! Not my daughter!

**MOTHER:** Yes, your daughter! Child of a suspect mother, and he, he's the same. Yet she's my son's wife!

**BRIDEGROOM:** We'll hunt them down! Find me a horse!

**MOTHER:** A horse, quick, bring me a horse! I'd give what I have for one, my eyes my tongue even...

**A VOICE:** Here!

**MOTHER:** (*To the Bridegroom*) Go, go! (*He starts to leave with two of the guests.*) No. Wait. That family are so swift to kill, so certain...and yet...hurry, and I must follow!

**FATHER:** It can't have been *her*. She'd rather drown herself in the well.

**MOTHER:** Someone honest, and pure, would run to drown themselves; but, no! Yet she's my son's wife now. There are two lots of kinfolk here. (*Everyone enters.*) My family, and yours. All of you...hunt them down! Shake the dust from your shoes. Go, help my son! (*The crowd splits in two*)

Federico García Lorca - Four Final Plays

For he has family, here; his cousins from the coast, and you who've come from miles around. Hunt them! Take every road. The hour of blood is here once more. Both lots of kinfolk. You and yours, I and mine. Go! Go!

*Curtain*

**ACT III SCENE 1**



*(Woodland. It is night. Large moist trees. A gloomy atmosphere. Two violins are heard. Three woodcutters appear.)*

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Have they found them?

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** No. But they're searching everywhere.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** They'll find them.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Sssh!

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** What?

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** They're closing in from all directions.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** When the moon rises they'll see them.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** They ought to let them go.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** The world is large. There's room for all.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** But they'll kill them.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** They followed their inclination: they were right to flee.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** They tried to deceive themselves, but in the end blood proved stronger.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** Blood!

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** They followed the urge of their blood.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** But blood that sees the light the earth soon drinks.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** So? Better to die of loss of blood than live with poison in your veins.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** Hush!

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Why? What do you hear?

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** Cicadas, frogs, and the night lying in wait.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** There's still no sound of a horse.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** No.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Then he's making love to her.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Her body is his, and his is hers.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** They'll hunt them down and kill them.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** But their blood will have mingled, and they'll be like two empty vessels, two dry streams.

Blood Wedding

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** There's heavy cloud, perhaps the moon will be hidden.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** The bridegroom will find them, moon or no moon. I saw him leave. Like a raging meteor. His face ashen. Revealing the family destiny.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** A family that dies in the street.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** That's it!

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** Do you think they'll break through the circle?

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Tricky. There are knives and guns in a three mile circuit.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** He rides a fine horse.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** But with a woman.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Here is the tree.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Forty foot high. We'll soon have it down.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** The moon's coming out. We'll have to hurry.

*(A brilliant light shines out from stage left)*

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Ay, the moon rises  
moon of the sharp knives.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Full of blood-wet jasmine!

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Ay, moon alone!  
Moon of the green blades!

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Silvering the bride's face.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** Ay, ill moon!

Leave the dark branch to love.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Ay, sad moon!

Leave the dark branch to love.

*(They exit. From the light stage-left the Moon appears. The Moon is a young woodcutter, with a white face. The scene acquires a bright blue glow.)*

**MOON:** White swan in the river,  
the eye of cathedrals,  
false dawn in the leaves,  
am I. They cannot hide!  
Who can escape? Who sobs  
in the valley's tangle?  
The moon leaves a knife  
behind in the air,  
a lead-coloured trap  
that seeks blood's cry.  
Let me in! I come frozen  
through walls and windows!  
Open roofs and breasts  
where I can be warmed!  
I'm chilled! My ashes  
of somnolent metals  
seek the crown of the fire  
among streets and mountains.  
But I bring the snow  
to their shoulders of jasper,  
and I flood, cold and harsh,  
the depths of the lakes.  
But this night my cheeks  
will be stained with red blood,  
and the reeds clustered  
in wide swathes of air.  
I have no shadow,  
nowhere they can hide!

## Blood Wedding

Let me enter a breast  
where I can be warmed!  
A heart of my own!  
Burning! Spilling itself  
on the hills of my breast;  
Let me come in! Oh, let me! (*To the branches*)  
No shadow. My rays  
must shine everywhere,  
and in dark of the trees  
spread a rumour of dawn,  
so my cheeks this night  
will be stained with red blood,  
and the reeds clustered  
in wide swathes of air.  
Who's that hiding! Speak out!  
No! There's no escape!  
I'll make the horse gleam  
with a fever of diamond.

*(The Moon vanishes among the trees and leaves the scene to its gloom. An old woman appears dressed in dark-green rags. She is bare-footed. Her face is hidden in the folds of her cloak. This character does not appear in the cast list.)*

**BEGGARWOMAN:** The moon is gone, and they are near by.

They'll not leave here. The sound of the river  
will drown in the sound of the trees  
the broken flight of their cries.  
It must be here, and soon. I am weary.  
The chests, and the white sheets ache  
await on the empty bedroom floors  
the heavy corpses with slashed throats.  
Not a bird will stir and the breeze,  
will sweep the sound of their cries  
away with her through the black trees,  
or bury them deep in gleaming mud.  
The moon! The moon! (*Impatiently*)  
The moon! The moon!

*(The Moon emerges. The intense light returns.)*

**MOON:** They're nearer now.

Some by the hill, the rest by the river.

I'll light their way. What do you need?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** Nothing.

**MOON:** The air is hardening, and double-edged.

**BEGGARWOMAN:** Light their waistcoats, pluck off the buttons,  
so that later the knives will know the road.

**MOON:** But let them die slowly. Let the blood seep  
slow through my fingers, a delicate whisper.  
Already my ashen valleys are stirring  
they yearn for that fount, its quivering flow!

**BEGGARWOMAN:** We won't let them pass the stream! Now, silence!

**MOON:** They're here!

*(The Moon vanishes. Leaving the scene in darkness.)*

**BEGGARWOMAN:** Swiftly! Light! Did you hear me? They must not escape!

*(The Bridegroom and a boy appear. The Beggar-woman sits, and covers herself with her cloak.)*

**BRIDEGROOM:** Through here.

**FIRST BOY:** You'll never find them.

**BRIDEGROOM:** *(Energetically)* When I do find them!

**FIRST BOY:** I think they've gone another way.

Blood Wedding

**BRIDEGROOM:** No. I heard a horse galloping not long ago.

**BOY:** It may be another horse.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Dramatically*) Listen. There's only one horse for me in all the world, and it's that one. Do you understand? If you're going to follow me, follow in silence.

**FIRST BOY:** I only meant...

**BRIDEGROOM:** Hush. I'm sure I'll find them here. See this arm? Well it's not mine. It's the arm of my brother, of my father, of all my family's dead. And it holds such power I could tear up this tree by its roots, if I wished. Now let's go on, because I feel their anger here in a manner that makes it impossible for me to breathe easily.

**BEGGARWOMAN:** (*Moaning*) Ay!

**FIRST BOY:** Did you hear that?

**BRIDEGROOM:** Go through there, then work your way back.

**FIRST BOY:** It's like a hunt.

**BRIDEGROOM:** It is a hunt. The greatest you can undertake.

*(The boy leaves. The Bridegroom moves swiftly to the left and stumbles over the Beggarwoman.)*

**BEGGARWOMAN:** Ay!

**BRIDEGROOM:** What is it?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** I'm cold.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Where are you travelling to?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** (*In the quavering voice of a mendicant*) Far from here...

**BRIDEGROOM:** Where are you from?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** From there...from afar.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Have you seen a man and woman riding a horse?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** (*Rousing herself*) Wait... (*She gazes at him*). A handsome young man. (*She rises*) Handsomer still if he were sleeping.

**BRIDEGROOM:** Answer me, have you seen them?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** Wait...What broad shoulders! Wouldn't you prefer to lie flat on them, and not have to stand on your feet which are so small?

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Shaking her*) I asked if you've seen them? Have they passed this way?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** (*Energetically*) They have *not*, but they're descending the hillside. Can't you hear them?

**BRIDEGROOM:** No.

**BEGGARWOMAN:** Do you know the way?

**BRIDEGROOM:** I'll find it; come what may!

**BEGGARWOMAN:** I'll go with you. I know this country.

**BRIDEGROOM:** (*Impatiently*) Come then! Which way?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** (*Dramatically*) Through here!

*(They leave swiftly. Two violins are heard far off which express the forest. The Woodcutters return, carrying their axes on their shoulders. They pass slowly through the trees.)*

Blood Wedding

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Ay! Death enters!  
Death of the sharp knives.

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Don't let the blood spurt!

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Ay! Death enters,  
Death of the dry leaves.

**THIRD WOODCUTTER:** Don't drown the flowers of the wedding!

**SECOND WOODCUTTER:** Ay! Sad death!  
Leave the green leaves of love.

**FIRST WOODCUTTER:** Ay! Ill death!  
Leave the green leaves of love.

*(They leave as they finish speaking. Leonardo and the Bride appear.)*

**LEONARDO:** Hush!

**BRIDE:** I'll go on alone from here.  
Go back! I want you to go!

**LEONARDO:** Hush, I said!

**BRIDE:** With your teeth,  
with your hands, if you can,  
cut from my honest neck  
the chain you've set there,  
leave me forgotten  
in my house of earth.  
And if you won't kill me  
like a nascent viper,  
place in the bride's hands  
the stock of your rifle.  
Ay, what grief, what fire  
runs through my head!  
What glass cuts at my tongue!

**LEONARDO:** There's no going back; hush!  
Because they're encircling us  
and I must take you with me.

**BRIDE:** Then it will be by force.

**LEONARDO:** By force? Who was it then  
first slipped down the stairs?

**BRIDE:** I did.

**LEONARDO:** Who put a fresh  
bridle on the horse?

**BRIDE:** I did. It's true.

**LEONARDO:** And whose hands  
fastened my spurs?

**BRIDE:** These hands which are yours,  
and which if they could  
would quell the blue branches  
and the stir of your veins.  
I love you! I love you! Go!  
For if I could only kill you,  
I'd wrap you in a shroud  
with violet fringes.  
Ay, what grief, what fire  
runs through my head!

**LEONARDO:** What glass cuts at my tongue!  
Because I wished to forget  
and build a wall out of stone  
between your house and mine.  
It's true? Don't you remember?  
And when I saw you afar  
I threw sand in my eyes.

But then I climbed on my horse  
and the horse came to your door.  
With the silver pins of your veil  
my blood turned to darkness,  
and dreams they filled my flesh  
with the rank odour of weeds.  
But the guilt of it isn't mine,  
the guilt belongs to the earth  
it is the perfume that rises  
from your breasts and your hair.

**BRIDE:** Ay, what madness! I wish  
neither bed nor board from you,  
yet there's no hour of the day  
that I don't long to see you,  
for you draw me, and I go,  
and you tell me to return  
and I follow you through the air,  
like a straw lost in the wind.  
I left a fine man behind  
and all his family there  
in the midst of the wedding  
dressed in my wreath of flowers.  
But you'll suffer for it,  
and I don't want you to.  
Leave me! Go far away!  
There's none here to defend you.

**LEONARDO:** The birds of the morning  
are stirring in the trees.  
The night itself is dying  
in a hard edge of stone.  
Let's find some dark corner,  
where I can always love you,  
where people will not matter  
nor the venom they engender.

*(He embraces her tightly)*

**BRIDE:** And I'll sleep at your feet  
to watch over your dreams.  
naked, I'll lie on the ground,  
just like a bitch on heat. *(Dramatically)*  
That's what I am! I see you  
And your beauty makes me burn.

**LEONARDO:** One fire lights another.  
The one little flame  
destroys the whole crop.  
Let's go! *(He gathers her up.)*

**BRIDE:** Where will we go?

**LEONARDO:** Anywhere where the men  
encircling us can't go.  
Where I can gaze at you!

**BRIDE:** *(Sarcastically)*  
Take me from fair to fair,  
all honest women's shame  
so the people can stare,  
with my wedding sheet  
like a banner in the wind.

**LEONARDO:** I too would leave you  
if I thought as they do.  
But I'll go where you go.  
You too. Take a step. Come.  
Splinters of moonlight pierce  
my waist and your hips.

*(The whole scene is intense, full of deep sensuality.)*

**BRIDE:** Did you hear?

Blood Wedding

**LEONARDO:** Someone comes.

**BRIDE:** Go!

It's right I should die here  
with my feet in the water,  
with thorns now in my hair.  
And for the leaves to mourn,  
a lost girl and a maiden.

**LEONARDO:** Hush. They are here.

**BRIDE:** Go now.

**LEONARDO:** Silence. They won't hear us.  
You go first. Go on, I say!

*(The Bride hesitates)*

**BRIDE:** Both together!

**LEONARDO:** *(Hugging her tightly)*  
Well, as you wish!  
If they part us,  
then I'll be dead.

**BRIDE:** And I too shall die.

*(They embrace and leave. The Moon appears very slowly. The scene acquires a fiery blue light. The two violins are heard. Suddenly two loud screams are heard, and the violins fall silent. With the second scream the Beggar-woman appears, with her back to the audience. She opens her cloak, and occupies centre stage, like a great bird with immense wings. The Moon halts. The curtain falls in the midst of absolute silence.)*

*Curtain*

## ACT III SCENE 2



*(A white room with archways and thick walls. White stairways to the left and right. At the back a wall of the same colour with a large arch. The floor should also be of a brilliant white. This simple room has the monumental feel of a church. There are no half-tones or shadows, not even enough to create a sense of perspective. Two girls dressed in dark blue are winding a skein of red wool. Another young girl is also present)*

**FIRST GIRL:** Skein, skein  
what would you be?

**SECOND GIRL:** Dress of jasmine,  
tie of crystal.  
To be born at four,  
and to die at ten.  
A strand of wool,  
a chain at your feet,  
and a knot to bind  
the bitter laurel.

**YOUNG GIRL:** Did you go to the wedding?

**FIRST GIRL:** No.

**YOUNG GIRL:** Neither did I!

What happened there  
among the dark vines?  
What happened there  
in the olive branches?  
What happened there  
that no one's returned?  
Did you go to the wedding?

**SECOND GIRL:** We both said no.

**YOUNG GIRL:** (*Leaving*)

Neither did I!

**SECOND GIRL:** Skein, skein  
what would you sing?

**FIRST GIRL:** Waxen wounds  
sorrow of myrtle.  
Sleep in the morning,  
waking at nightfall.

**YOUNG GIRL:** (*From the doorway*)

The thread runs  
over the stones.  
The blue hills  
it leaves behind.  
Runs, runs, runs  
and serves at last  
to handle a knife  
to sever a life.

(*She exits*)

**SECOND GIRL:** Wool, wool  
what would you tell of?

**FIRST GIRL:** A voiceless lover.  
A crimson husband.  
By the silent river  
I saw them lying.

*(She stops and gazes at the wool)*

**YOUNG GIRL:** Run, run run,  
the thread winds here.  
Shrouds of earth  
I hear them coming.  
Bodies laid out,  
sheaths of ivory!

*(She exits. Leonardo's wife and Mother-in-law appear filled with anguish.)*

**FIRST GIRL:** Are they coming soon?

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** *(Bitterly)* We don't know.

**SECOND GIRL:** What about the wedding?

**FIRST GIRL:** Tell me.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** *(Sharply)* There's nothing to tell.

**WIFE:** I want to turn back, I want to know.

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** *(Forcefully)*  
You, take to your house.  
Bravely, alone in your house.  
To grow old and to weep.  
Through the locked door.  
Never. Not dead or alive.

Blood Wedding

We'll nail shut the windows.  
Let rain and the night  
fall over the bitter grass.

**WIFE:** What can have happened?

**MOTHER-IN-LAW:** No matter.  
Hide your face in a veil.  
Your children are yours  
alone. On the bed  
make a cross of ash  
where his pillow lay.

*(They exit.)*

**BEGGARWOMAN:** *(From the doorway)*

A crust of bread, pretty girls?

**YOUNG GIRL:** Go away!

*(The girls huddle together)*

**BEGGARWOMAN:** And why?

**YOUNG GIRL:** Because of your whining. Be gone.

**FIRST GIRL:** Child!

**BEGGARWOMAN:** I could ask for your eyes! A cloud  
of birds follows me: do you want one?

**YOUNG GIRL:** I want to be gone from you!

**SECOND GIRL:** *(To the Beggar woman)* Ignore her.

**FIRST GIRL:** Did you come by the river path?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** That's the way I came.

**FIRST GIRL:** (*Timidly*) May I ask?

**BEGGARWOMAN:** I saw them: they come: two torrents  
quiet at last between the great stones,  
two men between the horse's hooves.  
Dead in the beauty of night. (*With delectation.*)  
Dead, yes, dead.

**FIRST GIRL:** Silence, old woman, silence!

**BEGGARWOMAN:** Crushed flowers their eyes, their teeth  
like two fists of hardened snow.  
Both of them fell, the bride returned  
her hair, her dress dyed with blood.  
Covered with blankets they come  
on the shoulders of handsome lads.  
It is so; that's all. It was just.  
On the golden flower, black sand.

**FIRST GIRL:** Black sand.

**SECOND GIRL:** On the golden flower.

**YOUNG GIRL:** Beneath the flower of gold  
They carry them from the river.  
Dark-haired the one,  
dark-haired the other.  
Let the nightingale of shadow  
fly, and call to the flower of gold!

*(She leaves. The stage is empty. The Mother enters with a neighbour. The neighbour has been weeping.)*

**MOTHER:** Hush.

Blood Wedding

**NEIGHBOUR:** I can't.

**MOTHER:** Hush, I said. (*In the doorway.*) Is there no one here? (*She raises her hands to her face.*) My son should have been here. But now my son is an armful of withered flowers. Now my son is a dark voice behind the mountains. (*Angrily, to the neighbour*) Will you be quiet? I'll have no tears in this house. Your tears are tears from your eyes, nothing more, but mine will flow when I'm alone, from the soles of my feet, from the root, and they'll flow hot as blood.

**NEIGHBOUR:** Come home with me; you can't want to stay here.

**MOTHER:** Here. Here, where I am. And in peace. They're all dead now. I'll be able to sleep at night, sleep free of the fear of guns and knives. Other women will lean sleepless from their windows, drenched by the rain, to catch sight of their sons' faces. Not I. My dreams will be of a cold dove of marble carrying flowers of frost to a graveyard. But no; not a graveyard, no grave; it's a couch of earth, a bed to cradle them, and rock them under the sky. (*A woman dressed in black enters, and kneels down at stage left.*) (*To the neighbour*) Take your hands from your face. The days to come will be terrible days. We wish for no one. The earth and I. My grief and I. And these four walls. Ay! Ay! (*She sits down, grief-stricken*)

**NEIGHBOUR:** Have pity on yourself.

**MOTHER:** (*Smoothing her hair back with her hands*) I must be calm. (*She remains seated*) Because the neighbours will come, and I don't wish them to see me so wretched. So poverty-stricken! A woman without a single son to clasp to her breast.

(*The Bride appears. her orange blossom has vanished and she is wearing a black shawl.*)

**NEIGHBOUR:** (*Approaching her angrily*) Where are you going?

**BRIDE:** I've come.

**MOTHER:** (*To the neighbour*) Who is it?

**NEIGHBOUR:** Don't you see?

**MOTHER:** That's why I ask who she is? To pretend I don't know, to avoid sinking my teeth in her throat. Viper! (*She rushes at the Bride as if to strike her, but stops short. To the neighbour*) Do you see her? Here she is, and she weeps, and I halt here, and I fail to tear out her eyes. I don't understand it myself. Did I not love my son enough? Well; and her honour? Where is her precious honour now? (*She strikes the Bride, who falls to the ground.*)

**NEIGHBOUR:** For God's sake! (*She tries to separate them*)

**BRIDE:** (*To the neighbour*) Let her go; I came here so that she could kill me, so that they could take me with them. (*To the Mother*) But not with your bare hands; with shears, with a sickle, with whatever force might break my bones. Let her be! I want her to know, in her anger, I am pure, and that they'll bury me without any man having gazed on the whiteness of my breasts.

**MOTHER:** Be silent; what does that matter to me?

**BRIDE:** Because I ran with another, I ran! (*Anguished*) You too, you would have gone. I was a woman on fire, wounded inside and out, and your son was a stream of water that could give me sons, land, health; but the other was a dark river, filled with branches, that brought me the murmur of its reeds, and its song between clenched teeth. And I went with your son who was like a child born of water, cold, while the other sent flocks of birds that prevented me walking, and sent frost into the wounds of a poor withered woman, a girl scorched by the flames. I did *not* want it. Listen to me! I did *not* want it. Do you hear? I did not want it. Your son was my goal, and I did not betray him, but the other seized me in his arms like a wave of the sea, struck me like the kick of a mule, and I must be dragged along forever, forever, forever, forever, even if I had been old and all your son's sons had held me back by the hair!

(*Another neighbour enters*)

Blood Wedding

**MOTHER:** She's not to blame. Nor I! (*Sarcastically*) Who is then? A fine whore, a light sleeper it is, who throws away her orange blossom to seek a corner of the bed warmed by another woman!

**BRIDE:** No more. No more! Take your revenge; here I am! Look how tender my throat is; it would cost you less effort to cut it than to cull a dahlia in your garden. But, what you say is not so! I'm as chaste and pure as a new-born babe. And with the power to prove it. Light a fire. Let's put our hands into its flames; you for your son, I, for my body. You'll be the first to withdraw.

(*Another neighbour enters*)

**MOTHER:** What does your purity matter to me? What does your death matter? What does nullity after nullity matter to me? Blessed are the crops, because my sons lie beneath them; blessed is the rain, because it moistens their faces. Blessed is God, who unites us in rest.

(*Another neighbour enters*)

**BRIDE:** Let me weep with you.

**MOTHER:** Weep, but over there, stand in the doorway.

(*The young girl enters. The Bride stands in the doorway, the Mother centre-stage.*)

**WIFE:** (*Entering and moving to the left*)

He was the finest of horsemen  
who now is a mound of snow.  
Through the fairs and mountains,  
and women's arms he rode.  
Now the mosses of midnight  
offer a crown for his brow.

**MOTHER:** Sunflower of your mother,  
mirror of all the earth.  
Set a cross on his breast  
of bitter oleander;  
a sheet now to cover him  
a sheet of gleaming silk,  
and water there to weep  
between his quiet hands.

**WIFE:** Ay! Let four boys lift him  
on their weary shoulders!

**BRIDE:** Ay! Let four young men  
carry death through the air!

**MOTHER:** Neighbours.

**YOUNG GIRL:** (*In the doorway*) They're bringing them now.

**MOTHER:** It's no matter.  
The Cross. The Cross.

**WOMEN:** Sweet are the nails,  
Sweet is the Cross,  
Sweet is the name  
of Jesus.

**BRIDE:** May the Cross shelter the dead and the living.

**MOTHER:** Neighbours: with a knife,  
with a little knife,  
on a fatal day between two and three,  
two men killed for love.  
With a knife.  
With a little knife  
that barely sits in the hand,  
but penetrates deep

through the startled flesh  
to reach the point  
where trembles enmeshed  
the dark root of a cry.

**BRIDE:** And this is a knife,  
a little knife  
that barely sits in the hand;  
a fish without scales, or the river,  
so that one fine day, between two and three,  
with this knife  
were quenched two strong men  
whose lips turn yellow.

**MOTHER:** It scarcely sits in the hand.  
But penetrates, chill,  
through the startled flesh  
to reach the point  
where trembles enmeshed  
the dark root of a cry.

*(The neighbours, kneeling on the floor, weep)*

*Curtain*



# YERMA

*A tragic poem in three acts and six scenes - 1934*



*'Reclining Young Woman in Spanish Costume'*  
Édouard Manet (French, 1832-1883)  
The Yale University Art Gallery

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Yerma

## CAST LIST

Yerma

Maria

Juan

Victor

Old Pagan Woman

Dolores

First Washer-Woman

Second Washer-Woman

Third Washer-Woman

Fourth Washer-Woman

Fifth Washer-Woman

Sixth Washer-Woman

First Young Girl

Second Young Girl

Female Mask

Male Mask

First Sister-in-Law

Second Sister-in-Law

First Woman

Second Woman

Child

First Man

Second Man

Third Man



## ACT I SCENE 1



*(When the curtain rises Yerma is asleep with an embroidery frame at her feet. A strange dreamy light fills the stage. A shepherd enters on tiptoe, gazing fixedly at Yerma. He leads a child dressed in white by the hand. The clock sounds. The shepherd leaves and the bluish light becomes the bright light of a spring morning. Yerma wakes.)*

**VOICE SINGING:** *(within)*

For a cradle, cradle, cradle  
for a cradle we will make  
a little cabin in the meadow  
and then shelter there'll we take.

**YERMA:** Juan. Do you hear me? Juan.

**JUAN:** I'm on my way.

**YERMA:** It's time.

**JUAN:** Have the oxen gone by?

**YERMA:** They've already gone.

**JUAN:** See you later. (*He prepares to leave*)

**YERMA:** You won't take a glass of milk?

**JUAN:** What for?

**YERMA:** You work hard and you're not made for work.

**JUAN:** When men are thin they're strong, like steel.

**YERMA:** Not you, though. When we married you were different. Now you're white-faced as if the sun never shines on you. I'd like to see *you* swim in the river, or climb on the roof when the rain is beating on our house. We've been married twenty months, and your face gets sadder, thinner, as if you were shrinking.

**JUAN:** Have you done?

**YERMA:** (*Rising*) Don't take it amiss. If *I* were ill I'd want *you* to take care of *me*. 'My wife's ill: I'll slaughter this lamb and make her a good meat stew. My wife's sick: I'll keep this chicken-fat to ease her chest; I'll take this sheepskin to protect her feet from the cold.' That's how I am. That's why *I* take care of *you*.

**JUAN:** And I'm grateful for it.

**YERMA:** But you don't let me.

**JUAN:** Because there's nothing the matter with me. It's just your imagination. I work hard. Every year I grow a little older.

**YERMA:** Every year...You and I will stay on here year after year...

**JUAN:** (*Smiling*) Naturally. And peacefully, too. The work is going well, we've no children to worry about.

**YERMA:** No children...Juan!

**JUAN:** What is it?

**YERMA:** Is it because I don't love you enough?

**JUAN:** You love me.

**YERMA:** I know girls who've trembled and wept before they climbed into bed with their husbands. Did I cry the first time I slept with you? Didn't I sing as I turned back the fine linen? Didn't I say: 'What a scent of apples these sheets hold?'

**JUAN:** That's what you said!

**YERMA:** My mother wept because I wasn't sorry to leave her. And it was true! No one was ever happier at being married. And yet...

**JUAN:** Hush.

**YERMA:** I will hush. And yet...

**JUAN:** It's too much, having to listen to it all the time...

**YERMA:** No. Don't tell me what they say. I see with my own eyes it's not true...the force of the rain falling on stone makes it crumble to soil, and weeds grow that people say are fit for nothing. Weeds may be fit for nothing, yet I still see their yellow flowers blowing in the breeze.

**JUAN:** We must hope!

**YERMA:** Yes, and love each other! (*Yerma , taking the initiative, kisses and embraces her husband*)

**JUAN:** If you need anything tell me and I'll get it for you. You know I don't like you going out.

**YERMA:** I never go out.

**JUAN:** You're better off here.

**YERMA:** Yes.

**JUAN:** The streets are for idlers.

**YERMA:** (*Darkly*) Of course.

*(The husband leaves and Yerma goes back to her sewing. She passes her hand over her belly, lifts her arms in a beautiful sigh, and sits down to sew.)*

**YERMA:** Where do you come from, my child?  
'From heights that are icy cold.'

*(She threads the needle)*

What do you need, my love?  
'The warm feel of your robe.'  
Let branches stir in the light  
and fountains leap in the air!

*(As if she is speaking to her child)*

A dog barks in the yard,  
a breeze sings in the trees.  
The ox lows for the herdsman  
and the moon ruffles my hair.  
What do you wish, child, far away?

*(She pauses)*

'The white hills of your breast'  
Let branches stir in the light  
and fountains leap in the air!

*(Sewing)*

I can only say yes, my child.  
I'll be broken and torn for you.  
What a grief it is to me now,  
your first cradle, this womb!  
When, my child, will you come?

*(Pause)*

'When it smells of jasmine, your flesh.'  
Let branches stir in the light  
and fountains leap in the air!

*(Yerma continues singing. Maria enters through the doorway carrying a bundle of clothes.)*

Where have you come from?

**MARIA:** From the store.

**YERMA:** From the store, so early?

**MARIA:** I'd have waited at the door till they opened to get what I wanted.  
Can you guess what I bought?

**YERMA:** I'd imagine coffee for breakfast, sugar, bread.

**MARIA:** No. I bought lace, three lengths of cloth, ribbons and coloured wool to make tassels. My husband had money and he gave it to me.

**YERMA:** You're going to make a blouse.

**MARIA:** No, it's for...you know?

**YERMA:** What?

**MARIA:** Because it's arrived! *(She lowers her head)*

*(Yerma rises and looks at her admiringly.)*

**YERMA:** In only five months!

**MARIA:** Yes!

**YERMA:** You can tell it's there?

**MARIA:** Of course.

**YERMA:** *(With curiosity)* And how do you feel?

**MARIA:** I don't know. *(Pause)* Worried.

**YERMA:** Worried. *(She takes hold of her)* But...when did it come? Tell me...You weren't expecting it?

**MARIA:** No, I wasn't...

**YERMA:** You could have been singing, couldn't you? I'm singing. You must...tell me about it...

**MARIA:** Don't ask. Have you ever held a live bird cupped in your hands?

**YERMA:** Yes.

**MARIA:** It's the same...but deep inside you.

**YERMA:** How beautiful! *(She gazes at her, at a loss)*

**MARIA:** I'm anxious. I don't know a thing.

**YERMA:** About what?

**MARIA:** About what I should do. I'll ask my mother.

**YERMA:** Why her? She's old and she's forgotten about all that. Don't walk too much, and when you breathe, breathe as softly as if you had a rose between your teeth.

**MARIA:** Listen, they say that later he kicks you gently with his little legs.

**YERMA:** And that makes you love him more, when you can say 'My son!'

**MARIA:** In the midst of it all I feel embarrassed.

**YERMA:** What did your husband say?

**MARIA:** Nothing.

**YERMA:** He loves you deeply?

**MARIA:** He doesn't say, but he clasps me and his eyelids quiver like green leaves.

**YERMA:** Did he know that...?

**MARIA:** Yes.

**YERMA:** And how did he know?

**MARIA:** I don't know. But on our wedding night he kept saying it to me with his mouth pressed against my cheek, so my child seems like a dove of light he set free in my ear.

**YERMA:** What joy!

**MARIA:** But you know more about this than I do.

**YERMA:** What use is it to me?

**MARIA:** It's true! Why that should be? Of all the brides of your year you are the only one...

**YERMA:** That's how it is. Of course there's still time. Helena took three years, and others in my mother's day even longer, but five years and twenty days, like me, is too long to wait. I don't think it is right for me to wear away my life here. Many a night I go out in the yard barefoot to walk about, I don't know why. If I go on like this, I'll end badly.

**MARIA:** See here, you foolish creature! You're talking like an old woman. What are you saying! No one should worry about these things. One of my mother's sisters had one after fourteen years, and you should have seen how beautiful a child it was!

**YERMA:** (*Eagerly*) What was he like?

**MARIA:** He bellowed like a little bull, with the energy of a thousand cicadas all buzzing at once, and he peed on us, and tugged our plaits, and when he was four months old he covered our faces with scratches.

**YERMA:** (*Laughing*) But it doesn't hurt.

**MARIA:** I tell you...

**YERMA:** Bah! I've seen my sister feed her child, and her breasts covered with scratches, and it hurt a lot, but it was a new pain, a good one, essential to health.

**MARIA:** They say you suffer a lot with children.

**YERMA:** It's a lie. That's what weak, complaining mothers say. Why do they have them? Having a child is no bouquet of roses. We must suffer if they're to grow. I sometimes think we must give half our blood to them. But that's good; healthy, beautiful. Every woman has enough blood for four or five children, and when she doesn't have them it sours her, as it shall me.

**MARIA:** I don't know what's wrong with me.

**YERMA:** I've heard the first time always makes you fearful.

**MARIA:** (*Timidly*) We'll see...How well you sew...

**YERMA:** (*Taking her bundle*) Give that to me. I'll cut you out two little dresses. And this?

**MARIA:** For diapers.

**YERMA:** Good. (*She sits down*)

**MARIA:** Well then...till later.

(*As she comes near Yerma presses her belly lovingly*)

**YERMA:** Don't go running over the cobblestones.

**MARIA:** Bye. (*She kisses her and exits*)

**YERMA:** Come again soon.

(*Yerma is in the same position as at the start of the scene. She takes her scissors and begins cutting out. Victor enters.*)

Hello Victor.

**VICTOR:** (*He has depth and a solid gravitas about him*) Where's Juan?

**YERMA:** Out in the fields.

**VICTOR:** What's that you're sewing?

**YERMA:** I'm sewing diapers.

**VICTOR:** (*Smiling*) Bravo!

**YERMA:** (*Laughing*) I'm going to trim them with lace.

**VICTOR:** If it's a girl, name her after yourself.

**YERMA:** (*Trembling*) What?

**VICTOR:** I'm happy for you.

**YERMA:** *(Almost choking)* No...they're not mine! They're for Maria's baby.

**VICTOR:** Fine, let's see if her example encourages you. This house needs a child.

**YERMA:** *(With anguish)* Needs one!

**VICTOR:** You can do it. Tell your husband to think about work less. He wants to make money and he will, but who will he leave it to when he dies? I'm going out to my sheep. Tell Juan to take the two he brought from me. And about the other thing...try harder! *(He exits, smiling)*

**YERMA:** *(Passionately)* That's it: try harder!

*(Yerma who has risen, in thought, goes to the place where Victor stood and breathes deeply as if she were breathing mountain air. Then she goes to the other side of the room as if seeking something, and then sits down and takes up the sewing again. She begins to sew and remains there with fixed gaze)*

*Curtain*

## ACT I SCENE 2



*(A field. Yerma enters, carrying a basket. The first Old Woman enters.)*

**YERMA:** Good Morning!

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Good luck to the lovely lady. Where are you going?

**YERMA:** I've just taken my husband his lunch. He's working in the olive grove.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Have you been married long?

**YERMA:** Three years.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Have you any children?

**YERMA:** No.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Oh, you'll have them!

**YERMA:** (*Eagerly*) Do you think so?

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Why not? (*She sits down*) I've just taken my husband his lunch too. He's old. He's still working. I've nine children, but since not one of them is a girl, I have to cross from one side of the river to the other.

**YERMA:** You live over the river.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Yes. By the mills. Who are your family?

**YERMA:** I'm the daughter of Enrique the shepherd.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Oh! Enrique the shepherd. I knew him. Good people. Rise, sweat, eat bread and die. No playing about, nothing. Fairs are for others. Silent people. I might have married an uncle of yours. But then...I've been a woman with her skirts in the wind, I've sped like an arrow to melon-cutting, fiestas, sugar-cakes. Many times at dawn I've run to the door thinking I heard music ebbing and flowing, but it was only the breeze. (*She laughs*) You'll laugh at me. I've had two husbands, fourteen children, six of them dead, and yet I'm not sad, and I'd like to go on living a long time. Here's what I say: fig-trees last! Houses last! And it's only we bedevilled women who turn to dust for some reason.

**YERMA:** I'd like to ask you something.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Let me look at you. (*She gazes at her*) I know what you're going to ask. There's no answer to such things. (*She rises*)

**YERMA:** (*Detaining her*) Why not? It's given me confidence hearing you talk. I've wanted to talk to an older woman for some time. Because I want to find out. Yes. You'll tell me...

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** What?

**YERMA:** (*Lowering her voice*) What you know. Why am I barren? Must I spend my whole life tending chickens, or pleating curtains for my windows? No. You must tell me what to do, and I'll do it; even if you tell me to stick needles into the most delicate parts of my eyes.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** I? I know nothing. I lay down, opened my mouth, and began to sing. Children flowed out like water. Ay! Who can say this body of ours isn't beautiful? You walk out, and at the end of the street a stallion neighs. Ay! Leave me alone, girl, don't make me speak. There are many things I don't want to talk about.

**YERMA:** Why not? With my husband I never talk about anything else.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Listen? Does your husband please you?

**YERMA:** In what way?

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Do you love him? Do you yearn to be with him...?

**YERMA:** I don't know.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Do you tremble when he comes near you? Do you feel as if you're dreaming when he brings his lips close? Tell me.

**YERMA:** No. No, I've never felt like that.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Never? Not even when you were dancing?

**YERMA:** (*Remembering*) Perhaps...just once...with Victor.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Go on.

**YERMA:** He held me by the waist and I couldn't say a word, I couldn't speak. Another time when I was fourteen, Victor (he was a strapping lad) took me in his arms to cross a ditch and I started shaking so much my teeth chattered. But it was because I was ashamed.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** And with your husband?

**YERMA:** That's different. My father gave me to him, and I accepted him. Happily. That's the plain truth. From the first day I was married to him I thought about...children...And I could see myself in his eyes. Yes, but it was myself rendered small, manageable, as if I were my own daughter.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Quite the opposite with me. Perhaps that's why you've no child as yet. Men must pleasure us, girl. They need to undo our tresses and have us drink from their mouths. So runs the world.

**YERMA:** For you, but not for me. I spend a lot of time thinking, thinking, and I'm sure that what I think about will be realised in my child. I gave myself to my husband for its sake, and I go on giving to see if the child will come, but never for pleasure.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** And the result is that you're empty!

**YERMA:** Not empty, no, because I'm filled with self-loathing. Tell me. Is it my fault? Should one seek in a man just the man and nothing more? Then what is one to think when he leaves you lying there in bed with sad eyes staring at the ceiling, and turns over and goes to sleep? Should I think of him or of what might come shining from my womb? I don't know, but you'll tell me, out of charity. (*She kneels down.*)

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** Oh what a trusting blossom! What a sweet creature you are! Leave me be. Don't make me say any more. I don't want to speak any more. These are matters of honour, and I don't abuse anyone's honour. You'll find out. At any rate, you should be less naïve.

**YERMA:** (*Sadly*) Girls brought up in the country, like me, find that all avenues to knowledge are closed to them. Everything is only muttered phrases, gestures, because they say you're not supposed to know about these things. And you too, you too are silent and you go away with a doctor's wise look, all-knowing, but denying aid to one dying of thirst.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** I could discuss it with a calmer person. With you: no. I'm old and I know what I'm saying.

**YERMA:** Then, God help me.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** God? No, I've never liked the idea of God. When are you going to realize he doesn't exist? It's men who will have to help you.

**YERMA:** But why do you say that? Why?

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** (*Exiting*) Though there ought to be a God, however feeble, to strike with lightening those men with barren seed who turn the joyful fields to mud.

**YERMA:** I don't know what you're trying to tell me.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** (*Continuing on her way*) Well, I understand. Don't be unhappy. Hope for the best. You're still very young. What would you have me say? (*She leaves*)

(*Two girls enter*)

**FIRST GIRL:** We keep meeting people everywhere.

**YERMA:** With all that needs doing, the men must work the olive groves, and we must take them food. Only the old folks are left at home.

**SECOND GIRL:** Are you going back to the village?

**YERMA:** I'm going that way.

**FIRST GIRL:** I'm in a hurry. I left the baby asleep and there's no one in the house.

**YERMA:** Then hurry, woman. Children shouldn't be left alone. If there are any swine roaming around your place....

**FIRST GIRL:** No. But you're right. I'm going now.

**YERMA:** Go. That's how things can happen. Surely you've locked the door.

**FIRST GIRL:** Of course.

**YERMA:** Even so, you don't realize what a little child is. Things that seem nothing to us might do away with him. A little needle, a mouthful of water.

**FIRST GIRL:** You're right. I'm off. I didn't think of that.

**YERMA:** Go now.

**SECOND GIRL:** If you had four or five you wouldn't speak like that.

**YERMA:** Why not? If I had forty...

**SECOND GIRL:** Anyway, you and I, who have none, live more peacefully.

**YERMA:** I don't.

**SECOND GIRL:** I do. What a bother they are! Yet my mother insists on giving me herbs so I'll produce, and in October we're going to pray to the Saint who they say grants children to women who yearn for them. My mother will ask for them, not I.

**YERMA:** Why marry then?

**SECOND GIRL:** Because they made me marry. They make everyone marry. If it goes on like this, there will only be little girls left. Anyway...in reality you're married long before you go to church. But the old women fret about these things. I'm nineteen and I hate cooking and cleaning. And now I have to spend the whole day doing what I hate. What for? Why did my husband need to become my husband? We do the same now as before. It's all old women's foolishness.

**YERMA:** Hush, don't say such things.

**SECOND GIRL:** You'll be calling me crazy too. 'Crazy! Crazy!' (*She laughs*) I tell you the one thing I've learned in life: everybody's stuck in their houses doing what they don't want to do. It's so much better outside. I go to the stream; I climb up and ring the bells, I take a drink of anisette.

**YERMA:** You're just a child.

**SECOND GIRL:** Sure, but I'm not crazy. (*She laughs*)

**YERMA:** Does your mother live at the top of the village?

**SECOND GIRL:** Yes.

**YERMA:** In the furthest house?

**SECOND GIRL:** Yes.

**YERMA:** What's her name?

**SECOND GIRL:** Dolores. What do you ask that for?

**YERMA:** Oh, nothing.

**SECOND GIRL:** To question her about...

**YERMA:** I don't know...people say...

**SECOND GIRL:** That's your business...Look, I'm going to take my husband his lunch. (*She laughs*) There's a thing. What a pity I can't say my sweetheart! (*She exits, laughing cheerfully*) Bye!

**VICTOR'S VOICE:** (*Singing*)

Why sleep alone, shepherd?  
Why sleep alone?  
You'd sleep much deeper  
on my quilt of wool.  
Why sleep alone, shepherd?

**YERMA:** (*Listening*)

Why sleep alone?  
You'd sleep much deeper  
on my quilt of wool.  
Your pillow's dark stone, shepherd,  
your shirt all of frost,  
grey rushes of winter  
in your midnight bed.  
The oaks weave their roots, shepherd  
under your head,  
and the girl's voice you hear  
is the voice of the stream.  
Shepherd, shepherd,  
what does it want of you?  
The hill's bitter grass womb.  
What infant is killing you?  
The thorn of the yellow broom!

*(She starts to leave, and meets Victor as he enters.)*

**VICTOR:** (*Cheerfully*) Where are you going, my beauty?

**YERMA:** Was that you singing?

**VICTOR:** It was.

**YERMA:** So fine! I've never heard you sing.

**VICTOR:** No?

**YERMA:** And what a strong voice. It's like a stream of water that fills your whole mouth.

**VICTOR:** I'm always happy.

**YERMA:** That's true.

**VICTOR:** And you are always sad.

**YERMA:** I'm not sad, but I have reason to be.

**VICTOR:** And your husband's sadder than you.

**YERMA:** He is. He has a dry character.

**VICTOR:** He always did. (*Pause. Yerma is seated*) Have you been to take him his lunch?

**YERMA:** Yes. (*She looks at him. Pause.*) What's that? (*She points to his face.*)

**VICTOR:** Where?

**YERMA:** (*She rises and approaches him*) Here...on your cheek. Like a burn.

**VICTOR:** It's nothing.

**YERMA:** It looks like one to me. (*Pause.*)

**VICTOR:** It must be the sun...

**YERMA:** Perhaps...(*She pauses. The silence is accentuated and without the slightest gesture a struggle begins between the two.*) (*Trembling*) Do you hear that?

**VICTOR:** What?

**YERMA:** Can't you hear crying?

**VICTOR:** (*Listening*) No.

**YERMA:** I thought I heard a child crying?

**VICTOR:** You did?

**YERMA:** Very near. And crying as if it were drowning.

**VICTOR:** There are always children round here, they come to steal fruit.

**YERMA:** No. It was the sound of a little child. (*Pause*)

**VICTOR:** I heard nothing.

**YERMA:** It's my imagination. (*She looks at him intently and Victor looks back then drops his gaze, as if in fear.*)

(*Juan enters*)

**JUAN:** Why are you still here?

**YERMA:** We were talking.

**VICTOR:** Farewell. (*He leaves*)

**JUAN:** You should be at home.

**YERMA:** I was delayed.

**JUAN:** I don't see what kept you.

**YERMA:** I was listening to the birds singing.

**JUAN:** That's fine. But it gives people something to talk about.

**YERMA:** (*Firmly*) What do you mean, Juan?

**JUAN:** I don't say it because of you, but because of other people.

**YERMA:** Other people be damned!

**JUAN:** Don't swear. That's ugly in a woman.

**YERMA:** If only I were a woman.

**JUAN:** Let's end this conversation. Go home. (*Pause*)

**YERMA:** All right. Shall I expect you?

**JUAN:** No. I'll be busy with the watering all night. There's not much water, it's mine till sunrise and I need to guard it from thieves. You go to bed and sleep.

**YERMA:** (*Dramatically*) I'll be sure to sleep! (*She exits*)

*Curtain*

## ACT II SCENE 1



*(A mountain stream where women from the village are washing their clothes. The washer-women are positioned at various levels.)*

**SINGING:** *(Before the curtain rises)*

I'll wash your fine ribbons,  
in the chill water.  
Like glowing jasmine,  
you're filled with laughter.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** I don't like gossip.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** Well, we talk here.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** There's no harm in it.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Whoever wants a good name must earn it.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** I planted a sprig,  
I watched it grow.  
Who wants a good name  
should live just so.

*(They laugh)*

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** That's how we say it.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** But nothing is known.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** It's certain her husband's brought both his  
sisters to live with them.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** The old maids?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Yes. They used to watch over the church and  
now they're watching over their sister-in-law. I couldn't bear them.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** Why not?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Because they make my flesh creep. They're like  
those huge leaves that spring up over graves. They're all waxy. They're  
all wrapped up in themselves. I think they must cook their food in lamp-  
oil.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** So they've arrived?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Yesterday. Her husband's back to the fields  
again.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** But doesn't anyone know what happened?

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** The night before last she spent sitting on her  
doorstep, in spite of the cold.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** But, why?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** It's all uphill work in that house.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** That's the way those masculine creatures are! When they should be making lace or apple pies, they prefer to climb on the roof or wade barefoot in the river.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** Who are you to say that? She's no children, but it's not her fault.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Those who want children have them. The ones who are spoiled, lazy, and soft aren't prepared to suffer a wrinkled belly.

*(They laugh)*

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** And they dab on face-powder and rouge and pin a spray of oleander on, and go looking for anyone but their husband.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** That's the truth!

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** But have you seen her with anyone?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Not us, but others have.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** Always, others!

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** On two occasions, they say.

**SECOND WASHER-WOMAN:** And what were they up to?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Talking.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** Talking's no sin.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** In this world just a glance can mean something, my mother used to say. A woman gazing at roses is not the same as a woman gazing at a man. She gazes at him.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** At whom?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Someone. Haven't you heard? Find out for yourself. Do you want me to say it out loud? (*Laughter*) And when she's not gazing at him, when she's alone, when he's not right in front of her, she sees him behind her eyes.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** That's not true!

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And the husband?

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** The husband acts as if he's deaf to everything. Unmoving: like a lizard in the sun.

(*Laughter*)

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** It would all sort itself out if they had a child.

**SECOND WASHER-WOMAN:** It's all about people who aren't content with their lot.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Hour by hour that house gets more hellish. She and the sisters-in-law, never opening their lips, washing the walls all day, polishing the copper, cleaning the windows with their breath, and oiling the floors. But, the more that house gleams, the more it seethes inside.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** It's all his fault; his. When a man can't give her children he should take more care of his wife.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** It's her fault, because she's a tongue hard as flint.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** What the devil's got into you that you talk about her so?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And who gave you licence to offer me advice?

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Be quiet, you two!

*(Laughter)*

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** I'd like to pierce all gossiping tongues with a knitting needle.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Be quiet.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And I the breasts of all hypocrites.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Hush. Look, don't you see the sisters-in-law are here.

*(They murmur. Yerma's two Sisters-in-Law appear. They are dressed in black. They begin their washing in silence. A sound of sheep-bells.)*

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** Are the shepherds off already?

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** Yes, all the flocks will be moved today.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** *(Breathing deeply)* I love the smell of sheep.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** You do?

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And why not? They smell of what's ours. Just as I like the smell of red mud that the river carries in winter.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** Fancy!

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** *(Gazing)* The flocks are mingling together.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** It's a woollen flood. Sweeping everything before it. If the green wheat had eyes it would tremble to see them coming.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** See how they run! What a herd of rascals!

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** They're all going, not one flock's missing.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Let's see...No...Yes, yes one is missing.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Whose?...

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Victor's.

*(The Sisters-in-Law sit up and look at one another)*

*(Quietly singing)*

I'll wash your fine ribbons,  
in the chill water.  
Like glowing jasmine,  
you're filled with laughter.

I'd like to live  
in the jasmine's  
white snowfall.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** But, alas, for a wife's barrenness!

Alas, for the one with sand at her breast!

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Say if your man

has the true seed,  
that through your dress  
the stream may run free.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Your dress is a boat

of silver and air  
sailing the shore.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** My child's clothes now

I wash in the river  
teaching the water  
its lessons of crystal.

**SECOND WASHER-WOMAN:** From the mountain he comes,  
my husband, to eat.  
He brings me one rose  
and I yield him three.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** From the meadows he comes,  
my husband, to dinner,  
He brings me live coals  
that with myrtle I cover.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** With the breeze he comes,  
my husband, to sleep.  
Red wallflowers for him,  
Red wallflowers for me.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** Flower with flower then shall be allied  
when summer the reaper's blood has dried.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And wombs be opened to sleepless birds  
when winter comes shivering through the firs.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** In the sheets, tears must be shed.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Let there be singing too!

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** When our husband brings us  
the garland, the bread.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Because bodies entwine and are wed.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Because light stabs our throats through.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And the branch's stem, it turns sweet.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And the hills are roofed by the tent of the breeze.

**SIXTH WASHER-WOMAN:** (*Appearing higher up the stream*)  
So that a child might fuse  
the morning's frozen dew.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And our bodies might hold  
furious branches of coral.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** So that there might be rowers  
riding the waves of the sea.

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** A child, now then, a little one.

**SECOND WASHER-WOMAN:** Opening wings and beak, the pigeons.

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** A child crying, a son.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** And men advancing  
like wounded stags so.

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Happiness, happiness, happiness  
of the swelling belly beneath the dress!

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** But, alas, for a wife's barrenness!  
Alas, for the one with sand at her breast!

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Let her shine!

**FIFTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Let her ride!

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** Let her shine out once more!

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** Let her sing!

**FIRST WASHER-WOMAN:** Let her hide!

**THIRD WASHER-WOMAN:** Let her sing as before!

**SIXTH WASHER-WOMAN:** Oh, the dawn that my child  
brings, in its clean pinafore.

**FOURTH WASHER-WOMAN:** *(They sing together)*

I'll wash your fine ribbons,  
in the chill water.  
Like glowing jasmine,  
you're filled with laughter.  
Ha, ha, ha!

*(They wash and beat the clothes rhythmically)*

*Curtain*

## ACT II SCENE 2



*(Yerma's house. Dusk. Juan is seated. The two Sisters-in-Law, standing.)*

**JUAN:** You say she went out not long ago? *(The older sister nods)* She must be at the spring. But, you know, I don't like her to go out alone. *(Pause)* You can lay the table. *(The younger sister enters)* The bread I eat is hard earned. *(To the sister)* I had a hard day yesterday. I was pruning the apple-trees, and as evening fell I began to wonder why I put so much effort into my work when I can't even raise an apple to my mouth. I'm tired. *(He passes his hand over his face. Pause)* She's not coming...One of you should have gone with her, that's why you're here eating at my table and drinking my wine. My life's in the fields, but my honour is here. And my honour is your honour too. *(The sister bows her head)* Don't take that amiss. *(Yerma enters carrying two pitchers. She halts in the doorway.)* Have you been to the spring?

**YERMA:** To fetch fresh water for the meal. *(The other sister enters)* How was it in the fields?

**JUAN:** Yesterday I pruned the trees.

*(Yerma puts down the pitchers. Pause.)*

**YERMA:** Are you staying?

**JUAN:** I have to guard the flock. You know it's the owner's duty.

**YERMA:** I know it only too well. You needn't repeat it.

**JUAN:** Every man has to lead his life.

**YERMA:** And every woman hers. I'm not asking you to stay. I have everything I need here. Your sisters look after me well. I eat roast lamb, soft bread and cheese here, and on the hillsides your cattle eat grass drenched with the dew. I'd have thought you'd be able to live peacefully.

**JUAN:** To live peacefully one must be tranquil.

**YERMA:** And you're not?

**JUAN:** No, I'm not.

**YERMA:** Don't say it.

**JUAN:** You know what I think. The ewe in the fold and the woman at home. You go out too much. Haven't I always said so?

**YERMA:** That's right. A woman in her home. When that home is not a tomb. When the chairs and the linen sheets wear out with use. But not here. Every night, when I go to bed, the bed seems newer, gleaming, as if it had just been brought from town.

**JUAN:** You yourself know I've a right to complain. That I have reason to be careful!

**YERMA:** Careful? About what? I've offended in nothing. I live obediently, and what I suffer I keep close to my chest. And every day that passes is worse. Let's be silent. I'll learn to bear my cross as best I can, but don't ask for anything more. If I suddenly turned into an old woman with a mouth like a withered flower, I might be able to smile and share my life with you more easily. Now...now leave me alone with my thorns.

**JUAN:** I don't understand you. I don't deprive you of anything. I send to town for whatever you wish. I have my faults, but I want to live peacefully and quietly with you. I want to sleep in the fields knowing you are asleep too.

**YERMA:** But I don't sleep, I can't sleep.

**JUAN:** Are you in need of something? Tell me. *(Pause)* Answer me!

**YERMA:** *(Deliberately, looking fixedly at her husband)* Yes, I'm in need.

*(Pause)*

**JUAN:** Always the same thing. It's more than five years. I've almost lost interest in it.

**YERMA:** But I'm not you. Men have another life: flocks, trees, comradeship; women only have children and childcare.

**JUAN:** Everyone is different. Why don't you have one of your brother's children here. I wouldn't object.

**YERMA:** I don't want to look after other people's children. I think my arms would freeze from holding them.

**JUAN:** You're half crazy with these ideas, instead of thinking only about what you should, and so you insist in running your head against a rock.

**YERMA:** A rock, and shameful that it is a rock, when it should be a basket of flowers and fragrances.

**JUAN:** Near you one feels only inquietude, dissatisfaction. In the end you'll become resigned to it.

**YERMA:** I didn't enter these four walls to become resigned. When my head is bound with a cloth so my mouth remains shut, and my hands are tied fast in the coffin, that's when I'll resign myself!

**JUAN:** Well, what *do* you want?

**YERMA:** I want to drink water and there's neither water nor glass; I want to climb the mountain and I've no feet; I want to embroider my dress and can't find the thread.

**JUAN:** The reality is you're not a woman, and you're trying to ruin a man against his will.

**YERMA:** I don't know what I am. Let me wander about and ease the pressure. I've not failed you in anything.

**JUAN:** I don't like people pointing me out. That's why I want to see this door closed tight, and all of you here in the house.

*(The First Sister enters slowly and walks towards some shelves.)*

**YERMA:** To talk with people's no sin.

**JUAN:** But it may appear so. *(The other Sister enters and goes towards the water-jars, from one of which she fills a pitcher.) (He lowers his voice.)* I'm not happy about it all. When people engage you in conversation, keep your mouth shut and remember you're a married woman.

**YERMA:** *(With amazement)* Married!

**JUAN:** And that there's such a thing as family honour, and honour is a burden we all must bear. (*The Sister with the pitcher leaves slowly.*)

But it can run dark or pale in the one set of veins. (*The other Sister leaves with a platter, in a ceremonial manner. Pause.*)

Forgive me. (*Yerma looks at her husband. He raises his head and his gaze meets hers.*)

Even though you look at me in such a way that I shouldn't ask forgiveness, but force you to obey me, lock you up, since that's what a husband should do.

(*The two Sisters appear at the door.*)

**YERMA:** I beg you not to talk this way. Let the matter rest. (*Pause.*)

**JUAN:** Let's go and eat. (*The two Sisters go inside.*) Did you hear me?

**YERMA:** (*Sweetly*) Eat with your Sisters. I'm not hungry yet.

**JUAN:** As you wish. (*He goes inside.*)

**YERMA:** (*Dreamily*)

Ay, what a field of stones!  
Ay what a door closed to beauty,  
to ask for a son, to suffer, while the breeze  
offers flowers of the slumbering moon!  
These two springs of warm milk  
I have, in the courts of my flesh  
are twin beats of a horse's hooves,  
to shake the branch of my anguish.  
Ay, blind breasts under my dress!  
Ay, doves without sight or whiteness!  
Ay, what grief of the captive blood  
goes nailing wasp-stings into my neck!  
But you must come, my love, my child,  
because water gives salt, and earth fruit,  
and our wombs hold tender children  
as the clouds are filled with sweet rain.

*(She gazes towards the doorway.)*

Maria! Why are you rushing past the door like that?

**MARIA:** *(Entering with her child in her arms.)* I hurry past whenever I have the child...You always weep! ...

**YERMA:** You're right. *(She takes the child and sits down.)*

**MARIA:** It make's me sad that you're envious. *(She sits.)*

**YERMA:** It's not envy I feel; it's my poverty.

**MARIA:** You shouldn't complain.

**YERMA:** How can I not complain, when I see you and other women filled with flowers within, and see myself, useless in the midst of so much beauty!

**MARIA:** But you've other things. If you'd listen to me, you'd be happy.

**YERMA:** A farmer's wife who can't bear children is as useless as a handful of thorns, almost seen as evil, even though I too come from this wasteland abandoned by God. *(Maria gestures as if to take the child)* Take him; he's happier with you. I seem to lack a mother's hands.

**MARIA:** Why do you say that?

**YERMA:** *(Rising.)* Because I'm tired: tired of them: of not being able to use them for something of my own. Because I'm hurt, hurt and humiliated beyond endurance, seeing the crops ripen, the fountains give water endlessly, the ewes bear scores of lambs, and the bitches pups, till the whole countryside seems to rise up to show me its tender sleeping young, while I feel only two hammer-blows here, instead of a child's mouth.

**MARIA:** I don't like what you're saying.

**YERMA:** Women, when they have children, don't think of those who don't. You're always refreshed, unknowing, as those who swim in fresh water have no idea of thirst.

**MARIA:** I won't repeat what I've always said.

**YERMA:** Every moment I feel more longing and less hope.

**MARIA:** That's wrong.

**YERMA:** I'll even end up imagining I'm my own child. Many a night I go down to feed the oxen, which I never did before, because women don't do that work: and when I cross the dark shed my footsteps sound like a man's.

**MARIA:** Everyone has their own ways.

**YERMA:** In spite of it all, I go on seeking. See how I live!

**MARIA:** And your sisters-in-law?

**YERMA:** You'll see me dead, without a shroud, if I should ever say a word to them.

**MARIA:** And your husband.

**YERMA:** All three are against me.

**MARIA:** What do they think of you?

**YERMA:** They're full of fantasies. Like all whose consciences are not clear. They think I want another man and don't realise that, even if I were to want one, with my kind honour comes first. They are stones in my path. But they don't see that if I wished I could become a flood of water sweeping them away.

*(One Sister enters, and leaves, carrying a loaf of bread)*

Yerma

**MARIA:** Even so, I think your husband still loves you.

**YERMA:** My husband gives me bread and shelter.

**MARIA:** What troubles you endure, what troubles, but remember the sufferings of Our Lord! (*They reach the doorway.*)

**YERMA:** (*Gazing at the child*) He's awake now.

**MARIA:** In a little while he'll start to sing.

**YERMA:** He has your eyes, you know? Have you noticed? (*Weeping*) He has the same eyes as you!

*(Yerma pushes Maria gently and she leaves silently. Yerma walks towards the door through which her husband went.)*

**SECOND GIRL:** Pssst!

**YERMA:** (*Turning*) What?

**SECOND GIRL:** I waited till she left. My mother's expecting you.

**YERMA:** Is she alone?

**SECOND GIRL:** She's with two neighbours.

**YERMA:** Tell them to wait a little.

**SECOND GIRL:** But will you go? Aren't you afraid?

**YERMA:** I'll go.

**SECOND GIRL:** It's up to you!

**YERMA:** Tell them to wait for me even if it's late!

*(Victor enters.)*

**SECOND GIRL:** *(Complicity)* Well, I'll bring the blouse.

**YERMA:** Whenever you wish. *(The Girl leaves)* Be seated.

**VICTOR:** I'm fine here.

**YERMA:** *(Calling to her Husband)* Juan!

**VICTOR:** I've come to say farewell.

**YERMA:** *(She trembles a little, but regains her composure.)* You're leaving with your brothers?

**VICTOR:** That's what my father wants.

**YERMA:** He must be old.

**VICTOR:** Yes, he's very old. *(Pause)*

**YERMA:** You're right to seek new pastures.

**VICTOR:** All pastures are the same.

**YERMA:** No. I'd like to go far, far away.

**VICTOR:** It's all the same. The same sheep: yielding the same wool.

**YERMA:** For men, yes, but it's different for women. I never heard a man as he ate say: 'How good these apples are!' You take what's yours without worrying over trifles. But as for me, I must say I've grown to hate the water from this well.

**VICTOR:** Perhaps so.

*(The stage is in soft shadow. Pause.)*

**YERMA:** Victor.

**VICTOR:** Yes?

**YERMA:** Why are you leaving? The people here like you.

**VICTOR:** I've behaved well. *(Pause.)*

**YERMA:** You always behave well. When you were a lad, you once carried me in your arms; do you remember? No one knows what may happen.

**VICTOR:** Things change.

**YERMA:** Some things don't. There are things shut behind walls that can't change because no one sees them.

**VICTOR:** That's how it is.

*(The Second Sister appears and goes slowly towards the door, where she remains standing, lit by the last rays of evening.)*

**YERMA:** But if they appeared suddenly and cried out, they'd fill the world with their cries.

**VICTOR:** Nothing would be gained. The ditch where it's dug: the flock in the fold; the moon in the sky; and man at his plough.

**YERMA:** What a pity we don't listen more to what our elders teach us!

*(The deep and melancholy sound of the shepherd's horn is heard.)*

**VICTOR:** The sheep.

**JUAN:** *(Entering)* Are you off?

**VICTOR:** I want to be over the pass by dawn.

**JUAN:** Have you any dispute with me?

**VICTOR:** No. It was a fair price.

**YERMA:** *(To Yerma)* I bought his sheep.

**YERMA:** You did.

**VICTOR:** *(To Yerma)* They're yours now.

**YERMA:** I didn't know.

**JUAN:** *(With satisfaction)* Well, they are.

**VICTOR:** Your husband will see his fields overflow.

**YERMA:** The bounty comes to the hands of the worker who seeks it.

*(The Sister who was in the doorway goes inside.)*

**JUAN:** Now we've so many sheep there's nowhere to put them.

**YERMA:** *(Darkly)* The earth is wide. *(Pause)*

**JUAN:** We can go together as far as the stream.

**VICTOR:** I wish this house great happiness.

*(He gives Yerma his hand.)*

**YERMA:** May God grant it so! Farewell!

*(Victor salutes her, and at an imperceptible movement of Yerma's, he turns.)*

**VICTOR:** Did you say something?

**YERMA:** *(Dramatically)* I said farewell.

Yerma

*(They leave. Yerma stands, gazing in anguish at the hand she gave to Victor. She goes rapidly stage left and picks up a shawl.)*

**SECOND GIRL:** *(Silently covering her head)* Let's go.

**YERMA:** Yes.

*(They leave cautiously. The scene is almost dark. The First Sister enters with a lamp that must not provide any light on stage but its own natural glow. She goes to the edge of the stage looking for Yerma. The shepherds' horns sound.)*

**FIRST SISTER:** *(In a low voice)* Yerma!

*(The Second Sister enters. They look at each other and go towards the door.)*

**SECOND SISTER:** *(Louder)* Yerma!!

**FIRST SISTER:** *(In an imperious voice, going to the door.)* Yerma!!!

*(She exits. The bells and horns of the flocks and shepherds are heard. The stage is completely dark.)*

*Curtain*

## ACT III SCENE 1



*(The house of Dolores, the wise woman. It is daybreak. Yerma and Dolores enter with two Old Women.)*

**DOLORES:** You were brave.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** There's no power on earth as great as desire.

**SECOND OLD WOMAN:** But the graveyard was very dark.

**DOLORES:** Many are the times I've said those prayers in the graveyard with women who wanted a child, and they were all frightened. All except you.

**YERMA:** I came here so it would happen. I don't think you're a deceitful person.

**DOLORES:** I am not. May my mouth fill with ants like the mouths of the dead if I've lied to you. The last time, I prayed with a beggar woman who'd been barren longer than you, and her womb became so beautifully fertile that she gave birth to two children, down by the river, because she didn't have time to reach the village, and she brought them to me herself in a cloth, for me to look after.

**YERMA:** And she walked, from the river?

**DOLORES:** She did. With her shoes and skirts drenched with blood...but her face was shining.

**YERMA:** And nothing bad happened to her?

**DOLORES:** What should happen? God is God.

**YERMA:** Of course, why would anything happen: she simply picked up the infants and washed them in running water. Animals lick them clean, don't they? My own son couldn't disgust me. I think that women who've just given birth are illuminated from within, and the infants sleep for hours at their breast listening to the flow of warm milk filling their breasts for them to suckle, for them to play with until they don't want any more, until they lift their heads 'a little more, my child...' and their faces and breasts are covered with white droplets.

**DOLORES:** You'll have a child now, I promise you.

**YERMA:** I will, because I must have one. Oh, I don't understand people. Sometimes, when I feel certain I never will, never...a wave of fire flows upwards from my feet, and everything seems empty, and people walking in the street, and cattle and stones, seem as if they are lighter than cotton. And I ask myself: why are they here?

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** It's right for a married woman to want children, but if she doesn't have them, why yearn so? The important thing in this world is to let life carry us along. I'm not criticising. You see how I've helped at the prayers. But what do you hope this land will give your son, happiness, or silver?

**YERMA:** I'm not thinking about tomorrow, but today. You're old and you see things like a book already read. I know I'm thirsty and that I'm not free. I need to hold my son in my arms so that I can sleep peacefully, and, listen closely now and don't be afraid of what I say, and even if I knew my son was going to torment me and hate me and drag me through the streets by my hair, I'd still welcome his birth with joy, because it's better to weep over a living man who gives us pain, than over this phantom that squats year after year on my breast.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** You're too young to take good advice. But, while you wait for God's grace, you ought to seek refuge in your husband's love.

**YERMA:** Ay! You've poked your finger into the deepest wound in my flesh!

**DOLORES:** Your husband's a good man.

**YERMA:** (*Rising*) He is good! He is! But so what? I wish he was bad. He goes out on the hills with his sheep, and at night he counts his money. When he covers me, he is carrying out his duty, but my thighs feel cold as a corpse's, and I, who've always been disgusted by sensual women, at that moment, I yearn to feel like a mountain of fire.

**DOLORES:** Yerma!

**YERMA:** I'm not shameless; but I know that children are born of a man and a woman. Ay! If I could only have them all by myself!

**DOLORES:** Remember your husband is suffering too.

**YERMA:** He's not. The thing is he doesn't long for children.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** You shouldn't say that!

**YERMA:** I can see it in his glance, and since he doesn't, he won't give them to me. I don't love him, I don't, and yet he's my only salvation. For family and honour's sake: my only salvation.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** (*Fearfully*) It will soon be dawn. You should go home.

**DOLORES:** Before you know it the flocks will be out and you shouldn't be seen alone.

**YERMA:** But I needed this. How many times should I repeat the prayer?

**DOLORES:** The laurel prayer, twice, and at noon Saint Anne's prayer. When you feel pregnant bring me the sack of grain you promised me.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** The mountain tops are already starting to lighten. Go on.

**DOLORES:** And they'll soon begin opening the gates, you must go the long way round by the ditch.

**YERMA:** (*Disheartened*) I don't know why I came!

**DOLORES:** You regret it?

**YERMA:** No!

**DOLORES:** (*Troubled*) If you're afraid I'll accompany you to the corner.

**YERMA:** There's no need!

**DOLORES:** (*Uneasily*) It'll be daylight when you get home.

(*Voices are heard.*)

**DOLORES:** Hush! (*They listen*)

**FIRST OLD WOMAN:** It's nothing. God be with you.

*(Yerma goes towards the door, but at this moment a knocking is heard. The three women remain stationary.)*

**DOLORES:** Who is it?

**A VOICE:** It is I.

**YERMA:** Open the door. *(Dolores is reluctant)* Will you open it?

*(Whispering is heard. Juan appears with the two Sisters)*

**FIRST SISTER:** Here she is.

**YERMA:** Here I am.

**JUAN:** Why are you here? If I could, I'd shout and wake the whole village, so they could see how the honour of my house has gone astray; but I have to swallow everything and be silent because you're my wife.

**YERMA:** If I could, I'd shout too, so even the dead would wake and testify to my innocence.

**JUAN:** No, that's not true! I can bear anything but lies. You deceive me, you trick me, and because I'm a man who labours in the fields my mind's not a clever enough match for yours.

**DOLORES:** Juan!

**JUAN:** You, not a word!

**DOLORES:** *(Firmly)* Your wife has done nothing wrong.

**JUAN:** She's been doing wrong since the very day of the wedding. Looking daggers at me, lying awake at night eyes open by my side, drowning the pillows in wicked sighs.

**YERMA:** Be quiet!

**JUAN:** And I won't take any more. Because you'd have to be made of steel to tolerate a woman who wants to stab her nails into your heart, and who leaves her house at night looking for what? Tell me, looking for what? The streets are full of men. There are no flowers to pick there.

**YERMA:** I won't allow you to say another word. Not a single one. You think you and your family are the only ones who care for honour, and you don't understand that my family have never needed to hide anything. Come. Come here and smell my clothes. Come closer! See if you can find an odour that's not yours, that's not come from your body. Set me naked in the midst of the square and spit on me: do what you want with me, since I'm your wife, but take care not to pin any other man's name on my breast.

**JUAN:** It's not I who pins it there; you do it by your conduct and everyone's starting to say it. They're beginning to say it out loud. When I meet a group of them, they fall silent; when I go to weigh the flour, they fall silent; and even at night in the fields, when I wake, it seems to me the trees fall silent too.

**YERMA:** I don't know the source of those evil winds that sour the wheat, but look for yourself, and see if the wheat is good!

**JUAN:** Nor do I know what a woman seeks leaving her house at all hours.

**YERMA:** (*Starting towards him, and embracing her husband*) I'm searching for you, for you. It's you I search for night and day without finding a place to draw breath. It's your blood, your help I want.

**JUAN:** Get away from me.

**YERMA:** Don't push me away, love me.

**JUAN:** Away!

**YERMA:** See how I'm abandoned. As if the moon were searching for herself in the sky. Look at me! (*She gazes at him*)

**JUAN:** (*He looks at her and pulls back brusquely*) Let me be!

**DOLORES:** Juan!

(*Yerma falls to the floor*)

**YERMA:** (*Loudly*) I went out searching for flowers and ran up against a wall. Ay! Ay! It's the wall I'll break my head against.

**JUAN:** Be quiet. Come on.

**DOLORES:** My God!

**YERMA:** (*Moaning*) Cursed be my father who gave me the blood that fathered a hundred sons. Cursed be that blood that searches in me for them, beating against the walls.

**JUAN:** I told you: be quiet!

**DOLORES:** Someone is coming! Speak more softly.

**YERMA:** I don't care. Let my voice at least be free, now that I'm falling into the darkest pit. (*She rises*) Let this beautiful thing at least emerge from my body and meet the air.

**DOLORES:** They're coming this way.

**JUAN:** Silence.

**YERMA:** Yes, yes! Silence. Don't fret.

**JUAN:** Come, quickly!

Yerma

**YERMA:** That's right! That's right! There's no point in wringing my hands!  
It's one thing to yearn in your mind...

**JUAN:** Hush.

**YERMA:** (*Softly*) It's one thing to yearn in your mind, another thing for the  
body, cursed body, not to respond. It's fate and I won't raise my arms  
against the waves. That's right! Let my mouth be dumb! (*She exits*)

*Curtain*

## ACT III SCENE 2



*(The environs of a hermitage high in the mountains. Downstage are the wheels of a cart and some canvas forming a rustic tent, where we see Yerma. Women enter with offerings for the shrine. They are barefoot. The cheerful Old Woman of the first act is on stage.)*

*(Singing while the curtain is raised)*

When you were single  
I never could see you,  
but now you are married we'll meet.  
When you were single  
I never could see you.  
I'll strip you bare now  
wife, and wanderer,  
when midnight sounds through the air.

**OLD WOMAN:** *(Sarcastically)* Have you drunk the holy water?

**FIRST WOMAN:** Yes!

**OLD WOMAN:** Now let's see it work.

**FIRST WOMAN:** We believe in it.

**OLD WOMAN:** You come to ask the saint for children, and it so happens every year more single men come on this pilgrimage. What's going on?  
*(She laughs)*

**FIRST WOMAN:** Why do you come if you don't believe?

**OLD WOMAN:** To watch. I'm crazy about seeing it all. And to look after my son. Last year two men killed themselves over a barren wife and I need to be vigilant. And, finally, because I feel like it.

**FIRST WOMAN:** God forgive you! *(She leaves)*

**OLD WOMAN:** *(Sarcastically)* May He forgive you too!

*(She leaves. Maria enters with the First Girl)*

**FIRST GIRL:** Is she here?

**MARIA:** There's the cart. It cost me a lot to get her here. She's been a month without rising from her chair. I'm afraid of her. She's possessed by some idea, I don't know what, but it must be a wicked one.

**FIRST GIRL:** I'm with my sister. She's been coming here for eight years, but with no result.

**MARIA:** Those who are meant to have children do so.

**FIRST GIRL:** That's what I say.

*(Voices are heard)*

**MARIA:** I've never liked these pilgrimages. Let's go down to the farms where there are people about.

**FIRST GIRL:** Last year, in the darkness, some young men felt my sister's breasts.

**MARIA:** For miles around you hear nothing but dreadful tales.

**FIRST GIRL:** I saw more than forty barrels of wine behind the hermitage.

**MARIA:** A stream of single men flows through these mountains.

*(Voices are heard. Yerma enters with six Women who are going to the chapel. They are barefooted and carrying ornamental candles. Twilight falls.)*

Lord, who makes the roses flower  
don't leave my rose to wither.

**SECOND WOMAN:** Over her body that suffers  
may the yellow rose flower.

**MARIA:** And in your servants' bellies  
set free earth's hidden fires.

**CHORUS OF WOMEN:** Lord, who makes the roses flower  
don't leave mine to wither.

*(They kneel.)*

The heavens have their gardens  
of happiness in flower:  
glows the rose of wonder  
between briar and briar.  
A ray of dawn appears  
an angel watches over,  
with his wings of thunder  
with his eyes that suffer.  
All about the leaves, there  
runs a milk-white river

moistening the faces  
of the stars that quiver.  
Lord, may your rose bloom  
in my barren flesh.

*(They rise.)*

**SECOND WOMAN:** Lord, with your hand calm  
the embers of her cheeks.

**YERMA:** Listen to the penitent  
in her sacred wandering.  
Let your rose bloom in my flesh  
though with a thousand thorns.

**CHORUS:** Lord, who makes the roses flower  
don't leave my rose to wither.

**YERMA:** To my flesh that suffers  
bring the rose of wonder.

*(They leave.)*

*(Girls enter from the left running, with large garlands in their hands. From the right, three others the same, looking behind them. There is a crescendo of voices from the stage, accompanied by bells on horse-collars and harnesses. On a higher level seven girls appear, waving their garlands towards the left. The noise increases and two traditional Masks appear: one male and the other female. The masks they carry are large. The Male carries a bull's horn in his hand. They are not in any way grotesque, but very beautiful and with a suggestion of earthly purity. The Female shakes a ring of large bells.)*

**CHILDREN:** The devil and his wife! The devil and his wife!

*(The rear of the stage fills with people who shout and comment on the dance. It is quite dark.)*

In a stream along the mountain  
the sorrowing wife was bathing.  
All about her body creeping  
little snails through the water.  
The sands all along the shore  
and all the breezes of morning  
brought a flame to her laughter  
and made her shoulders shiver.  
Ay, nakedly she stood there  
lovely lady of the water!

**A BOY:** Ay, how she moaned there!

**FIRST MAN:** Ay the withering of love!

**BOY:** In the wind and the water!

**SECOND MAN:** Let her say whom she longs for!

**FIRST MAN:** Let her say whom she waits for!

**SECOND MAN:** Ay, with her empty womb  
and with her waning beauty!

**WOMAN'S MASK:** When the darkness falls I'll tell you  
when the glittering night is falling.  
When it gleams above our wandering  
I'll rip the seams of my clothing.

**BOY:** Suddenly there came the nightfall.  
Ay how the night came falling!  
See there the darkness gathering  
in the depths of mountain water.

*(The sound of guitars commences.)*

**MALE MASK:** (*Rising, and shaking the horn*) Ay, now how white  
the sorrowful wife!  
Ay, how she sighs in the branches!  
You'll be red poppies, carnations,  
when the man spreads his mantle.

(*He approaches.*)

If you come her wandering  
begging for your womb to flower  
don't you wear a mourning veil,  
but a fine gown of soft linen.  
Walk alone along the walls where  
the fig-trees grow thickest,  
and support my mortal body  
till the white dawn moans.  
Ay, how she shines there!  
Ay, how she was shining there!  
Ay, how the woman quivers!

**FEMALE MASK:** Ay let love wreath her  
with coronets and garlands,  
arrows of brightest gold  
through her breasts be darted!

**MALE MASK:** Seven times she wept there,  
nine times rose again.  
Fifteen times they joined  
orange-tree with jasmine.

**FIRST MAN:** Strike her with the horn!

**SECOND MAN:** With the rose in the dance.

**FIRST MAN:** Ay, how the woman quivers!

**MALE MASK:** In this wandering  
the man always commands.  
The husband is the bull,  
ever the man commands,  
and women are the flowers,  
for the one who wins.

**BOY:** Strike her with the breeze.

**SECOND MAN:** Strike her with the branch.

**MALE MASK:** Come and see the splendour  
of she who is bathing!

**FIRST MAN:** Like a reed she bends.

**BOY:** Like a flower she bows.

**MEN:** Let the young girls flee!

**MALE MASK:** Let the dance flare high  
and the shining body  
of the spotless wife!

*(The girls dance to the sound of clapping and music. They sing.)*

**GIRLS:** The heavens have their gardens  
of happiness in flower:  
glows the rose of wonder  
between briar and briar.

*(Two girls pass by shouting. The Cheerful Old Woman enters.)*

**OLD WOMAN:** Let's see if you'll let us sleep now. But there'll be something  
else later. *(Yerma enters)* You? *(Yerma is downcast and silent.)* Why did you  
come here? Tell me.

**YERMA:** I don't know.

**OLD WOMAN:** You're not convinced? And your husband?

*(Yerma shows signs of fatigue, and acts like someone whose mind is oppressed by a fixed idea.)*

**YERMA:** He's over there.

**OLD WOMAN:** What's he doing?

**YERMA:** Drinking. *(Pause. Putting her hands to her forehead.)* Ay!

**OLD WOMAN:** Ay, ay. Less of that: show more spirit. I couldn't tell you before but now I can.

**YERMA:** What can you tell me that I don't know already?

**OLD WOMAN:** What can no longer be silenced. What shouts itself from the rooftops. The fault is your husband's, do you hear? Let him cut off my hands if it isn't. Neither his father, nor his grandfather conducted themselves like man who breed well. For them to have a child heaven and earth had to be joined. They're just balls of spit. But your family are not. You have brothers and cousins for miles around. See what a curse has fallen on your beauty!

**YERMA:** A curse. A blight of venom on the crop.

**OLD WOMAN:** But you have feet on which you can leave his house.

**YERMA:** Leave?

**OLD WOMAN:** When I saw you in the procession my heart leapt. Women come here to find new men, and the Saint performs miracles. My son is waiting for me behind the chapel. My house needs a woman. Mate with him and the three of us can live together. My son is strong. Like me. If you enter my household, there'll be the smell of babies again. The ashes of your coverlet will turn to bread and salt for your children. Come. Take no notice of others. And as for your husband, in my house there are strong hearts and weapons to prevent him even crossing the street.

**YERMA:** Hush, hush! It's not like that! I can't take another. I can't go seeking men out. Do you think I could know another man? Where would my honour be then? Water can't run uphill or the full moon rise at noon. No. I'll keep to the path I'm on. Did you really think I could yield to another man? That I could go and beg for what is mine, like a slave? Understand me, so you never say it to me again. I am not seeking any other.

**OLD WOMAN:** When one is thirsty, one is grateful for water.

**YERMA:** I'm like a parched field where a thousand pairs of oxen should drive the plough, and what you offer me is a little glass of water from the well. My grief is one that's already beyond the flesh.

**OLD WOMAN:** (*Firmly*) Then stay that way. Since you wish to. Like a thistle in a wasteland. Pinched and barren.

**YERMA:** (*Firmly*) Barren yes, I know that! Barren! You don't need to hurl it in my face. Don't come and pleasure yourself, as children do, with the sufferings of some small creature. Ever since I married I've been avoiding that word and this is the first time I've heard it said to my face. The first time I recognise that it's true.

**OLD WOMAN:** You rouse no sympathy in me, none. I'll go look for another wife for my son.

*(She exits. A large choir of pilgrims is heard singing in the distance. Yerma moves towards the cart, and her husband appears from behind it.)*

**YERMA:** Were you there all along?

**JUAN:** I was there.

**YERMA:** Spying on me?

**JUAN:** Spying.

**YERMA:** You heard what I said?

**JUAN:** Yes.

**YERMA:** So? Leave me and go and join the singing. (*She sits on the canvas.*)

**JUAN:** It's time I spoke too.

**YERMA:** Speak, then!

**JUAN:** And time I complained.

**YERMA:** About what?

**JUAN:** That I have a bitterness in my throat.

**YERMA:** And I in my bones.

**JUAN:** This is your last chance to resist this continual lament for shadowy things, outside existence, for things that are lost in the breeze.

**YERMA:** (*With dramatic astonishment*) Outside existence you say? Lost in the breeze, you say?

**JUAN:** Things which haven't happened and neither you nor I can control.

**YERMA:** (*Violently*) Go on, go on!

**JUAN:** For things that don't matter. Do you hear? That have no importance to me. That's what I had to say to you. What matters to me is what I can hold in my hands, what I can see with my eyes.

**YERMA:** (*Rising to her knees, desperately*) That's it. That's it. That's what I wanted to hear from your mouth. Truth is not felt when it's inside oneself, but how vast it is, how loud it cries, when it emerges, and raises its arms! It's doesn't matter! Now, I've heard you!

**JUAN:** (*Approaching her*) Think that it had to be so. Listen to me. (*He embraces her to help her rise.*) Many women would be happy to live your life. Life is sweeter without children. I'm happy without them. It's not your fault.

**YERMA:** What did you seek in me, then?

**JUAN:** Yourself.

**YERMA:** (*Excitedly*) That's it! You wanted a home, tranquillity and a woman. But nothing more. Is that true?

**JUAN:** It's true. As everyone else does.

**YERMA:** And the rest? Your son?

**JUAN:** (*Firmly*) Didn't you hear, it doesn't matter! Don't ask me again! Do I have to shout it in your ear so you can understand, and live peacefully for once!

**YERMA:** And you've never thought about it even when you could see I wanted one?

**JUAN:** Never. (*They are both on the ground*)

**YERMA:** And I'm not to hope for one?

**JUAN:** No.

Yerma

**YERMA:** Nor you?

**JUAN:** Nor I, likewise. Resign yourself!

**YERMA:** Barren!

**JUAN:** But living peacefully. Both of us: in gentleness and friendship.  
Embrace me! (*He embraces her*)

**YERMA:** What do you want?

**JUAN:** I want you. In the moonlight you are beautiful.

**YERMA:** You want me as if you were wanting a pigeon to eat.

**JUAN:** Kiss me...like this.

**YERMA:** That, never. Never (*Yerma gives a cry and grasps her husband by the throat. He falls backward. She chokes him until he is dead. The choir of pilgrims starts up.*) Barren, barren, but I'm certain at last. Now I know for certain. And alone. (*She rises. People begin to gather.*) I'll sleep, without waking with a start to see if my blood announces new blood. With a body barren forever. What do you want? Don't come near me: because I've murdered my child! I've killed my own son!

*(The group that remained in the background gathers. We hear the sound of the choir of pilgrims.)*

*Curtain*



The House of Bernarda Alba

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA  
(*LA CASA DE BERNARDA ALBA*)

*A drama of women in the villages of Spain - 1936*



*'Camprodon, Spain'*

John Singer Sargent (American, 1856 - 1925)

*The National Gallery of Art*

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The poet declares that these three acts  
are intended as a photographic record.

## CAST LIST

Bernarda, aged sixty

María Josefa, (Bernarda's mother), aged eighty  
Angustias, (Bernarda's daughter), aged thirty-nine

Magdalena, (Bernarda's daughter), aged thirty  
Amelia, (Bernarda's daughter), aged twenty-seven

Martirio, (Bernarda's daughter), aged twenty-four

Adela, (Bernarda's daughter), aged twenty

Servant, aged fifty

La Poncia (a servant), aged sixty

Prudencia, aged fifty

Beggar woman with little girl

Women mourners

Woman 1

Woman 2

Woman 3

Woman 4

Young girl



## ACT I



*(The bright white interior of Bernarda's house. Thick walls. Arched doorways with canvas curtains edged with tassels and ruffles. Rush chairs. Paintings of non-realistic landscapes with nymphs and legendary kings. It is summer. A vast shadowy silence fills the scene. When the curtain rises the stage is empty. The tolling of bells is heard. The Servant enters.)*

**SERVANT:** I can feel the tolling of those bells right between my temples.

**LA PONCIA:** *(She enters eating bread and sausage)* They've been making that row for more than two hours now. There are priests here from all the villages. The church looks lovely. During the first response Magdalena fainted.

**SERVANT:** She's the one who'll be most bereft.

**LA PONCIA:** She was the only one who loved her father. Ay! Thank God we're alone for a while! I was hungry.

**SERVANT:** If Bernarda could see you...!

The House of Bernarda Alba

**LA PONCIA:** Now she's not eating, she wants us all to die of hunger! So strict! So domineering! But hard luck! I've opened the sausage jar.

**SERVANT:** (*Sadly, with longing*) Poncia, won't you give me some for my little girl?

**LA PONCIA:** Go on, and take a handful of chick-peas too. She won't notice it, today!

**VOICE:** (*From within*) Bernarda!

**LA PONCIA:** The old woman. Is she locked in?

**SERVANT:** Two turns of the key.

**LA PONCIA:** You should use the bolt too. She's got fingers like picklocks.

**VOICE:** Bernarda!

**LA PONCIA:** (*Shouting*) She's coming! (*To the Servant*) Make sure the whole place is clean. If Bernarda doesn't find everything gleaming she'll pull out the little hair I have left.

**SERVANT:** What a woman!

**LA PONCIA:** Tyrant of all she surveys. She could squat on your chest for a year and watch you die slowly without wiping that cold smile from her cursed face! Clean those pots: go on!

**SERVANT:** My hands are red raw from endless cleaning.

**LA PONCIA:** She's the cleanest; she's the most decent; she's the loftiest of beings. Her poor husband deserves a good rest.

(*The bells cease ringing.*)

**SERVANT:** Are all the relatives here?

**LA PONCIA:** On her side. His family detests her. They came to make sure he was dead, and make the sign of the cross.

**SERVANT:** Are there enough chairs?

**LA PONCIA:** Plenty. Let them sit on the floor. Since Bernarda's father died no one has set foot inside these walls. She doesn't want them to see her in her stronghold! Curse her!

**SERVANT:** She's always been good to you.

**LA PONCIA:** For thirty years I've laundered her sheets; for thirty years I've eaten her leftovers; spent nights awake when she had a cough; whole days peering through the cracks to spy on the neighbours and bring her the news; there are no secrets between us, and yet I curse her! May needles prick out her eyes!

**SERVANT:** Woman!

**LA PONCIA:** But I'm a good bitch and bark when I'm told, and bite the heels of the beggars when she whips me on; my sons work her fields and they're both married too, but one day I'll have had enough.

**SERVANT:** And then...

**LA PONCIA:** Then I'll lock myself in a room with her, and spit on for her a year. 'Bernarda, here's for this, and that, and the other,' until she looks like a lizard the children squashed, because that's what she is, and all her family. But I don't envy her life, that's for sure. She's five women on her hands, five ugly daughters. Except for Angustias, the eldest, who's the first husband's daughter and has some money, the rest of them have lots of fine lace, and linen camisoles, but their only inheritance is bread and water.

**SERVANT:** I wouldn't mind having what they have!

**LA PONCIA:** We have our hands, and we'll have a hole in God's earth.

**SERVANT:** That's the only earth they'll give us, who have nothing.

**LA PONCIA:** *(By the cupboard)* This glass has marks on it.

**SERVANT:** They won't come off even with soap and water.

*(The bells sound.)*

**LA PONCIA:** The final prayers. I'm off to hear them. I love the priest's singing. In the paternoster his voice rose up, and up, and up like a pitcher slowly filling with water. Of course at the end he gave a screech, but it was a glory to hear him! There's no one these days to match the old sexton, Tronchapinos. He sang at the Mass for my mother, who is in glory. The walls would shake, and when he said Amen it was if a wolf was in church. *(Imitating him)* Ameeeen! *(She begins coughing)*

**SERVANT:** You'll strain your windpipe.

**LA PONCIA:** I may have strained something else! *(She goes out laughing)*

*(The servant goes on cleaning. The bells ring)*

**SERVANT:** *(Picking up the sound)* Ding, ding, dong. Ding, ding, dong. May God grant him forgiveness!

**BEGGARWOMAN:** *(With her little girl)* Praise be to God!

**SERVANT:** Ding, ding, dong. May he wait long years for us. Ding, ding, dong.

**BEGGARWOMAN:** *(Loudly with annoyance)* Praise be to God!

**SERVANT:** *(Annoyed)* Forever!

**BEGGARWOMAN:** I've come for the leavings.

*(The bells cease ringing.)*

**SERVANT:** The street's that way. Today's leavings are for me.

**BEGGARWOMAN:** You've someone to feed you, woman. My child and I are on our own!

**SERVANT:** The dogs are on their own too, but they survive.

**BEGGARWOMAN:** They always give me the scraps.

**SERVANT:** Get out of here. Who said you could enter? You've left dirty footmarks already. *(The woman leaves. The Servant goes on cleaning.)* Polished floors, cupboards, pedestals, iron bed-frames, while those of us who live in a mud hut with only a plate and a spoon have a bitter pill to swallow. I pray for the day when there's none of us left to tell the tale! *(The bells ring out again)* Yes, yes, go on ringing! Bring on the box with its gold trimmings and the silk straps to lift it by! We'll both end up the same! Rot then, Antonio María Benavides, stiff in your wool suit and your tall boots. Rot! You'll not be lifting my skirts again behind the stable door!

*(At the back of the stage the Women Mourners enter in pairs. They wear voluminous black skirts and shawls and carry black fans. They enter slowly until they have filled the stage.)*

**SERVANT:** *(Beginning to wail)* Ay, Antonio María Benavides, never will you see these walls again or eat bread in this house! I was the one of all your servants who loved you most. *(Pulling at her hair)* Must I live on when you are gone? Must I live on?

*(The crowd of women have now entered, and Bernarda appears with her five daughters.)*

**BERNARDA:** *(To the Servant)* Be silent!

**SERVANT:** *(Weeping)* Bernarda!

**BERNARDA:** Less wailing and more work. You should have made sure this house was clean for the mourners. Go. This isn't your place. (*The Servant exits sobbing.*) The poor are like animals. It's as if they're made of some other substance.

**FIRST WOMAN:** The poor have their sorrows too.

**BERNARDA:** But they forget them faced with a plate of chickpeas.

**YOUNG GIRL:** (*Timidly*) You have to eat to live.

**BERNARDA:** At your age you shouldn't speak in front of your elders.

**FIRST WOMAN:** Hush, child.

**BERNARDA:** I never let anyone lecture me. Be seated. (*They sit. Pause.*) (*Firmly*) Magdalena, stop crying. If you want to weep, get under your bed. Do you hear me?

**SECOND WOMAN:** (*To Bernarda*) Have you started harvesting?

**BERNARDA:** Yesterday.

**THIRD WOMAN:** The sun feels as heavy as lead.

**FIRST WOMAN:** I've not known heat like this for years!

(*Pause. They fan themselves.*)

**BERNARDA:** Is the lemonade ready?

**LA PONCIA:** (*Entering with a large tray, full of small white jars which she hands around.*) Yes, Bernarda.

**BERNARDA:** Give some to the men.

**LA PONCIA:** They've already have theirs in the yard.

**BERNARDA:** Let them leave the way they entered. I don't want them coming through here.

**YOUNG GIRL:** (*To Angustias*) Pepe el Romano was with the mourners.

**ANGUSTIAS:** He was there.

**BERNARDA:** It was his mother. She saw his mother. No one saw Pepe, neither she nor I.

**YOUNG GIRL:** I thought...

**BERNARDA:** The widower from Darajali was there. By your aunt. We all saw him.

**SECOND WOMAN:** (*Aside, in a low voice*) Evil, worse than evil!

**THIRD WOMAN:** (*To the Servant*) A tongue like a knife!

**BERNARDA:** Women shouldn't look at any man in church except the priest, and only because he wears a skirt. Gazing around is for those seeking the warmth of a pair of trousers.

**FIRST WOMAN:** (*In a low voice*) Dried up old lizard!

**LA PONCIA:** (*Muttering*) A crooked vine to be looking for a man's heat!

**BERNARDA:** (*Striking the floor with her stick*) Praise be to God!

**ALL:** (*Crossing themselves*) May He be blessed and praised forever!

**BERNARDA:** Rest in peace, with the host of saints above your head!

**ALL:** Rest in peace!

**BERNARDA:** With St Michael the Archangel  
armed with his sword of justice.

**ALL:** Rest in peace!

**BERNARDA:** With the key that opens all gates  
and the hand that closes them.

**ALL:** Rest in peace!

**BERNARDA:** With all those who are blessed  
and the little lights of the field.

**ALL:** Rest in peace!

**BERNARDA:** With holy charity  
and the souls of earth and sea.

**ALL:** Rest in peace!

**BERNARDA:** Grant rest to your servant Antonio María Benavides, and the  
crown of your sacred glory.

**ALL:** Amen.

**BERNARDA:** (*Rises and chants*) 'Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine'.

**ALL:** (*Rising and chanting in Gregorian mode*) 'Et lux perpetua luceat eis'. (*They  
cross themselves.*)

**FIRST WOMAN:** May you have health to pray for his soul.

(*They begin to file out.*)

**THIRD WOMAN:** You shall never want for a loaf of warm bread.

**SECOND WOMAN:** Nor a roof over your daughters' heads.

*(They file out past Bernarda. Angustias exits through the door leading to the courtyard.)*

**FOURTH WOMAN:** May you enjoy the true harvest of your marriage.

**LA PONCIA:** *(Entering with a bag)* This money is from the men, for prayers.

**YOUNG GIRL:** *(To Magdalena)* Magdalena.

**BERNARDA:** *(To Magdalena who is starting to cry)* Shhh! *(She strikes the floor with her stick. They all leave.) (Towards those who have left)* Go on, back to your caves and criticise everything you've witnessed! I hope it will be long before you darken my door again.

**LA PONCIA:** You've no room for complaint. The whole village was there.

**BERNARDA:** Yes, to fill my house with the sweat from their clothing and the venom of their tongues.

**AMELIA:** Mother, don't speak like that!

**BERNARDA:** It's the only way to speak when you live in a cursed village without a river, without wells, where one drinks the water fearing always that it's poisoned.

**LA PONCIA:** Look what they've done to the floor!

**BERNARDA:** As if a flock of goats had trampled over it. *(La Poncia scrubs at the floor.)* Child, pass me a fan.

**AMELIA:** Take this one. *(She hands her a circular fan decorated with flowers in red and green.)*

**BERNARDA:** *(Throwing the fan on the ground)* Is this the fan to hand to a widow? Give me a black one, and learn to respect your father's memory.

**MARTIRIO:** Take mine.

**BERNARDA:** And you?

**MARTIRIO:** I don't feel hot.

**BERNARDA:** Find another one, you'll need it. Through the eight years of mourning not a breeze shall enter this house. Consider the doors and windows as sealed with bricks. That's how it was in my father's house and my grandfather's. Meanwhile, you can embroider your trousseaux. In the chest I've twenty pieces of cloth from which you can cut sheets and covers. Magdalena can embroider them.

**MAGDALENA:** It's all the same to me.

**ADELA:** (*Sourly*) If you don't want to embroider them, leave them plain. *Yours* will look better that way.

**MAGDALENA:** Yours *and* mine. I know I'll never be married. I'd rather hump sacks to the mill. Anything but sit here day after day in this dark room.

**BERNARDA:** That's what it is to be a woman.

**MAGDALENA:** Then curses on all women.

**BERNARDA:** Here, you do what I say. You can't go telling tales to your father. A needle and thread for women. A whip and a mule for men. That's how it is for people born without wealth.

(*Adela exits*)

**A VOICE:** Bernarda! Let me out!

**BERNARDA:** (*In a loud voice.*) Let her out, now!

(*The servant enters.*)

**SERVANT:** It was an effort to hold her down. She may be eighty years old but your mother is tough as an oak tree.

**BERNARDA:** It runs in the family. My grandmother was the same.

**SERVANT:** While the mourners were here I had to gag her several times with an empty sack because she wanted to shout for you to bring her a drink of dishwater, and the dog meat she says you give her.

**MARTIRIO:** She's a troublemaker!

**BERNARDA:** *(To the Servant)* She can let off steam in the yard.

**SERVANT:** She's taken the rings and amethyst earrings from her box, and put them on, and she tells me she wants to get married.

*(The daughters laugh.)*

**BERNARDA:** Go with her and take care she doesn't go near the well.

**SERVANT:** I doubt she'll throw herself in.

**BERNARDA:** No, not that...but if she's there the neighbours can see her from their windows.

*(The Servant exits)*

**MARTIRIO:** We'll go and change our clothes.

**BERNARDA:** Very well, but keep your headscarves on. *(Adela enters.)* And where's Angustias?

**ADELA:** *(Pointedly)* I saw her peeping through a crack in the gate. The men have just left.

**BERNARDA:** And why were you at the gate, yourself?

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**ADELA:** I went to see if the hens had laid.

**BERNARDA:** But the male mourners should already have left!

**ADELA:** (*Deliberately*) There was a group of them still standing outside.

**BERNARDA:** (*Angrily*) Angustias! Angustias!

**ANGUSTIAS:** (*Entering*) What is it?

**BERNARDA:** What were you gazing at, and whom?

**ANGUSTIAS:** No one.

**BERNARDA:** Is it proper for a woman of your class to be trying to attract a man on the day of your father's funeral? Answer me! Who were you gazing at?

(*Pause*)

**ANGUSTIAS:** I...

**BERNARDA:** You!

**ANGUSTIAS:** No one!

**BERNARDA:** (*Advancing with her stick*) Spineless, sickly creature! (*She hits her.*)

**LA PONCIA:** (*Rushing over*) Bernarda, be calm! (*She holds her: Angustia weeps.*)

**BERNARDA:** All of you, leave! (*They exit*)

**LA PONCIA:** She did it without thinking what she was doing, and that is was wrong of course. I was shocked to see her sneaking towards the courtyard! Then she stood by the window listening to the men's conversation, which as always was not fit to hear.

**BERNARDA:** That's what they come to funerals for! (*With curiosity*) What were they saying?

**SERVANT:** They were talking about Paca la Roseta. Last night they tied her husband to the manger, and carried her off on horseback to the heights of the olive grove.

**BERNARDA:** And she...?

**LA PONCIA:** She was willing enough. They said she went with her breasts exposed and Maximiliano held her tight as if he were gripping a guitar. Disgraceful!

**BERNARDA:** And what happened?

**LA PONCIA:** What was bound to happen. They came back at daybreak. Paca la Roseta had her hair down, and a garland of flowers on her head.

**BERNARDA:** She's the only loose woman in the village.

**LA PONCIA:** Because she's not from here. She's from far off. And those who went with her are sons of foreigners too. Men from here aren't up to such things.

**BERNARDA:** No, but they like to look on, and gossip, and smack their lips over what occurred.

**LA PONCIA:** They said other things too.

**BERNARDA:** (*Looking round with some apprehension.*) What sort of things?

**LA PONCIA:** I'm ashamed to mention them.

**BERNARDA:** And my daughter heard them.

**LA PONCIA:** She must have done?

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**BERNARDA:** She takes after her aunts; white and sickly and making sheep's eyes at any old flatterer's compliments. How we have to suffer and struggle to make sure people act decently and don't slide downhill!

**LA PONCIA:** Your daughters are of an age to receive compliments! They scarcely oppose you. Angustias must be over thirty by now.

**BERNARDA:** Thirty nine to be exact.

**LA PONCIA:** Imagine. And she's never had a suitor...

**BERNARDA:** (*Angrily*) No, none of them has, and they don't need them! They're fine as they are.

**LA PONCIA:** I didn't mean to offend you.

**BERNARDA:** There's no one who can compare to them for miles around. The men here are not of their class. Would you have me give them up to any beggar who asks?

**LA PONCIA:** You should have moved to some other village.

**BERNARDA:** Indeed, to sell them off!

**LA PONCIA:** No, Bernarda, for a change...Of course anywhere else they'd be poor!

**BERNARDA:** Hold your spiteful tongue!

**LA PONCIA:** There's no talking to you. Are we not friends?

**BERNARDA:** No, we're not. You serve me, and I pay you. Nothing more!

**SERVANT:** (*Entering*) Don Arturo is here, he's come to discuss the will.

**BERNARDA:** I'm coming. *(To the Servant)* Start whitewashing the courtyard.  
*(To Poncia)* And you: go and put all the dead one's clothes in the big chest.

**LA PONCIA:** We could give some of the things...

**BERNARDA:** Nothing. Not a button! Not even the handkerchief we covered his face with! *(She goes out slowly, leaning on her stick and looks back at her servants as she goes. The servants leave. Amelia and Martirio enter.)*

**AMELIA:** Have you taken your medicine?

**MARTIRIO:** For all the good it will do!

**AMELIA:** But you've taken it.

**MARTIRIO:** I do things without any faith in them, like a piece of clockwork.

**AMELIA:** You seem better since the new doctor arrived.

**MARTIRIO:** I feel the same.

**AMELIA:** Did you notice? Adelaida wasn't there at the funeral.

**MARTIRIO:** I knew she wouldn't be. Her fiancé won't let her walk in the streets. She used to be happy: now she doesn't even powder her face.

**AMELIA:** I no longer know if it's better to have a fiancé or not.

**MARTIRIO:** It makes no difference.

**AMELIA:** It's all the gossip that's to blame, they won't let you live. Adelaida must have had a bad time of it.

**MARTIRIO:** They're afraid of mother. She's the only one who knows the truth about Adelaida's father and how he got his land. Whenever she comes here, mother sticks the knife in. Her father killed his first wife's

husband, in Cuba, in order to marry the wife. Then he abandoned her here, and went off with another woman who had a daughter, and then had an affair with the daughter, Adelaida's mother, and married her when the second wife died insane.

**AMELIA:** And why is the wretch not in jail?

**MARTIRIO:** Because men cover up things of that nature among themselves, and no one's willing to speak out.

**AMELIA:** But Adelaida's not to blame for all that.

**MARTIRIO:** No, but tales are repeated. And to me it all seems one dreadful repetition. Her fate is the same as her mother's and her grandmother's, both wives of the man who engendered her.

**AMELIA:** What a terrible thing!

**MARTIRIO:** It's preferable never to see a man. Since childhood they make me afraid. I'd see them in the yard yoking the oxen and lifting the sacks of wheat, shouting and stamping, and I was always afraid of growing older and suddenly finding myself in their arms. God has made me feeble and ugly and has always kept them away from me.

**AMELIA:** Don't say such things! Enrique Humanes was after you and he liked you.

**MARTIRIO:** People invent things! Once I stood by the window in my nightgown till dawn, because his farmhand's daughter told me he was going to stop by, but he never came. It was all talk. Then he married another girl with more money than I.

**AMELIA:** And she, as ugly as the devil!

**MARTIRIO:** What does beauty mater to them? What matters are land, oxen, and a submissive bitch to fetch them their food.

**AMELIA:** Ay!

*(Magdalena enters)*

**MAGDALENA:** What are you doing?

**MARTIRIO:** Standing here.

**AMELIA:** And you?

**MAGDALENA:** I'm walking about, to stretch my legs a while. I've been looking at the pictures grandmother embroidered, the little poodle and the Negro fighting a lion that we loved so much when we were children. That was a happier time. A wedding lasted ten days and there was no malicious gossip. Today they're more refined. Brides wear white veils as they do in the towns, and we drink bottled wine, but we waste away because of their chatter.

**MARTIRIO:** God only knows what used to go on!

**AMELIA:** *(To Magdalena)* One of your shoelaces is undone.

**MAGDALENA:** What of it!

**AMELIA:** You'll step on it and fall!

**MAGDALENA:** One less...

**MARTIRIO:** Where's Adela?

**MAGDALENA:** Oh, she put on the green dress that she first wore on her birthday, and went into the yard and shouted: 'Hen, hens, look at me!' I had to laugh!

**AMELIA:** If mother had seen her!

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**MAGDALENA:** Poor thing! She's the youngest of us and full of illusions. I'd give anything to see her happy.

*(Pause. Angustias crosses the stage with some towels in her hands.)*

**ANGUSTIAS:** What time is it?

**MAGDALENA:** It must be twelve.

**ANGUSTIAS:** That late?

**AMELIA:** It's about to strike!

*(Angustias exits)*

**MAGDALENA:** *(Pointedly)* Have you heard...? *(Indicating Angustias)*

**AMELIA:** No.

**MAGDALENA:** Come on!

**MARTIRIO:** I don't know what you're referring to!

**MAGDALENA:** You know more about it than I. You always have your heads together, like little sheep, but you never tell anyone anything. This business about Pepe el Romano!

**MARTIRIO:** Oh that!

**MAGDALENA:** *(Imitating her)* Oh that! It's talked about all over the place. Pepe el Romano is to marry Angustias. He was round the house last night, and I think he'll soon send someone to ask for her.

**MARTIRIO:** I'm pleased! He's a good man.

**AMELIA:** And I. Angustias has fine qualities.

**MAGDALENA:** Neither of you are pleased.

**MARTIRIO:** Magdalena!

**MAGDALENA:** If he wanted Angustias for herself, for Angustias the woman, I'd be pleased, but he's after the money. Angustias is our sister but we're family and know she's ageing and unwell, and of us all she has always had the least to offer. If she looked like a broomstick with clothes on at twenty, what is she now at forty!

**MARTIRIO:** Don't talk like that. Good fortune comes to those who least expect it.

**AMELIA:** She speaks the truth though! Angustias has her father's money, she's the only wealthy one in this house and now that our father is dead and they're sharing out his estate, they're after her!

**MAGDALENA:** Pepe el Romano is twenty-five years old and the handsomest man in the whole neighbourhood. The natural thing would be for him to court you, Amelia, or Adela, who is only twenty, but not go after the least attractive one in this house, a woman who, like her father, talks through her nose.

**MARTIRIO:** Perhaps he likes her!

**MAGDALENA:** I've never been able to stand your hypocrisy!

**MARTIRIO:** Heaven preserve us!

*(Adela enters)*

**MAGDALENA:** Have the chickens seen you in that yet?

**ADELA:** And what would you have me do with it?

**AMELIA:** If mother sees you she'll drag you about by the hair!

**ADELA:** I'm so pleased with this dress. I thought I'd wear it if we were to go and eat melons by the mill. There'd be nothing to equal it.

**MARTIRIO:** It's a lovely dress!

**ADELA:** And it suits me. It's the best Magdalena ever made.

**MAGDALENA:** And what did the chickens say to it?

**ADELA:** They passed on some of their fleas, and my legs got bitten. (*They laugh.*)

**MARTIRIO:** You could dye it black.

**MAGDALENA:** The best she can do is pass it on to Angustias when she weds Pepe el Romano.

**ADELA:** (*With suppressed emotion*) Pepe el Romano!

**AMELIA:** Haven't you heard the talk?

**ADELA:** No.

**MAGDALENA:** Well now you know!

**ADELA:** But it's not possible!

**MAGDALENA:** Money makes everything possible!

**ADELA:** Is that why she followed the mourners and looked through the door. (*Pause*) And that man is capable of...

**MAGDALENA:** He's capable of anything.

(*Pause*)

**MARTIRIO:** What are you thinking of, Adela?

**ADELA:** I'm thinking that this mourning period has come at the worst possible time in my life.

**MAGDALENA:** You'll get used to it.

**ADELA:** (*Bursting into angry tears*) No, no I won't get used to it! I don't want to be shut in. I don't want my skin to become like yours. I don't want to lose my bloom in these rooms! Tomorrow I'll put on my green dress and I'll go for a walk in the street! I want to go out!

(*The Servant enters.*)

**MAGDALENA:** (*Authoritatively*) Adela!

**SERVANT:** Poor child! She misses her father so! (*She exits.*)

**MARTIRIO:** Hush!

**AMELIA:** It will be the same for all of us.

(*Adela calms down.*)

**MAGDALENA:** The servant almost overheard you.

**SERVANT:** (*Appearing*) Pepe el Romano's at the top of the street.

**MAGDALENA:** Let's go and look!

(*They exit swiftly*)

**SERVANT:** (To Adela) Aren't you going with them?

**ADELA:** No, I'm not interested.

**SERVANT:** When he turns the corner you can see him best, from the window in your room. (*She exits.*)

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*(Adela remains there, in two minds. After a moment she too rushes out, to her room. Bernarda and La Poncia enter.)*

**BERNARDA:** Cursed will!

**LA PONCIA:** What a lot of money for Angustias!

**BERNARDA:** Yes.

**LA PONCIA:** And for the others, quite a lot less.

**BERNARDA:** You've said it three times already and I chose not to answer.  
Quite a lot less: much less. Don't remind me again.

*(Angustias enters, her face made up.)*

**BERNARDA:** Angustias!

**ANGUSTIAS:** Mother.

**BERNARDA:** How dare you powder your face? How dare you even wash it,  
on the day of your father's funeral?

**ANGUSTIAS:** He wasn't my father. Mine died years ago. Have you forgotten  
about him?

**BERNARDA:** You owe more to this man, your sisters' father, than your  
own! Thanks to this one you've inherited a fortune.

**ANGUSTIAS:** That remains to be seen!

**BERNARDA:** If only out of decency! Out of respect!

**ANGUSTIAS:** Mother, let me go out.

**BERNARDA:** Out! After you've cleaned that powder from your face!  
Cunning little hypocrite! Just like your aunts! (*She rubs the powder off vigorously with her handkerchief.*) Now, go out!

**LA PONCIA:** Bernarda, don't meddle so much!

**BERNARDA:** Even if my mother's crazy I have my five senses intact, and I know exactly what I'm doing.

*(The other daughters enter.)*

**MAGDALENA:** What's going on?

**BERNARDA:** Nothing's going on.

**MAGDALENA:** (*To Angustias*) If you're arguing about the inheritance, you, the richest of us anyway, you can stick the lot of it.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Watch your foul tongue!

**BERNARDA:** (*Banging on the floor with her stick*) Don't think it will give you any power over me! Till I leave this house, feet first, I'll manage your business and mine!

*(Voices are heard and María Josefa, Bernarda's mother, appears, very old and with hair and breast decked with flowers.)*

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** Bernarda, where's my shawl? You don't need anything of mine, not my rings, and not my black moiré dress, because none of you will ever be married. Not one! Bernarda, give me my pearl necklace!

**BERNARDA:** (*To the Servant*) Why did you let her in here?

**SERVANT:** (*Trembling*) She escaped me!

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**MARÍA JOSEFA:** I escaped her because I want to get married, because I wish to marry a handsome young man from the seashore: here the men run away from women.

**BERNARDA:** Be quiet, mother!

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** No, I won't be quiet. I don't want to see these single women, foaming at the mouth for marriage, their hearts turning to dust, and I want to go back to my village. Bernarda, I want a man to marry and be happy with!

**BERNARDA:** Lock her up!

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** Let me go out, Bernarda!

*(The Servant takes hold of María Josefa.)*

**BERNARDA:** Help, all of you!

*(They all help to drag the old woman away.)*

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** I want to go! Bernarda! I want to be married by the seashore, by the seashore!

*Swift Curtain*

## ACT II



*(The bright white interior of Bernarda's house. The doors on the left lead to the bedrooms. Bernarda's daughters are seated on low chairs, sewing. Magdalena embroiders. La Poncia is with them.)*

**ANGUSTIAS:** I've finished cutting the third sheet.

**MARTIRIO:** It's for Amelia.

**MAGDALENA:** Angustias, shall I do Pepe's initials as well?

**ANGUSTIAS:** *(Dryly)* No.

**MAGDALENA:** *(Loudly)* Adela, are you coming?

**AMELIA:** She's lying down.

**LA PONCIA:** She's got something. She's restless, quivering, frightened, as if she had a lizard between her breasts.

**MARTIRIO:** She's got nothing more than what we all have.

**MAGDALENA:** All except Angustias.

**ANGUSTIAS:** I'm fine, and anyone who doesn't like it can go to the devil.

**MAGDALENA:** Well, one has to say the best things about you have always been your figure and your sensitivity.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Fortunately, I'll soon be free of this hell.

**MAGDALENA:** Perhaps' you won't be!

**MARTIRIO:** Let's change the subject!

**ANGUSTIAS:** And, besides, better an ounce of gold in one's coffer than a pair of dark eyes in one's head!

**MAGDALENA:** In one ear and out the other.

**AMELIA:** (*To La Poncia*) Open the door to the courtyard, and see if we can have a little fresh air in here.

(*La Poncia does so.*)

**MARTIRIO:** All last night I couldn't sleep with the heat.

**AMELIA:** Nor I!

**MARTIRIO:** I got out of bed to cool myself. There was a black storm cloud and even a few drops of rain.

**LA PONCIA:** It was one in the morning, and the earth was still fiery. I got out of bed too. Angustias was at the window with Pepe.

**MAGDALENA:** (*Ironically*) Was it as late as that? What time did he leave?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Magdalena, why ask since you saw him?

**AMELIA:** He left at about half past one.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Yes. How do you know that?

**AMELIA:** I heard his cough, and the hooves of his mare.

**LA PONCIA:** But I heard him leaving at four!

**ANGUSTIAS:** Then it wasn't him!

**LA PONCIA:** I'm sure it was!

**AMELIA:** It seemed to me too...

**MAGDALENA:** How odd!

*(Pause.)*

**LA PONCIA:** Listen, Angustias, what did he say to you the first time he came to your window?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Nothing. What would he say? Trivial things.

**MARTIRIO:** What's truly odd is that two people who don't know each other should suddenly meet at an open window and become engaged.

**ANGUSTIAS:** I don't find it astonishing.

**AMELIA:** It would make me feel strange.

**ANGUSTIAS:** No it wouldn't, because when a man comes to your window he already knows from the coming and going, from the give and take, that the answer can only be yes.

**MARTIRIO:** Fine, but he still has to ask.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Of course!

**AMELIA:** (*Curious*) So, what did he say?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Well, nothing much. ‘You know I’m after you, that I need a good woman, a modest one, and that it’s you if you’ll agree.’

**AMELIA:** Things like that embarrass me!

**ANGUSTIAS:** Me too, but you have to suffer them!

**LA PONCIA:** And did he say anything else?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Yes, he never stopped talking.

**MARTIRIO:** And you?

**ANGUSTIAS:** I couldn’t speak. My heart almost leapt out of my mouth. It was the first time I’d been alone at night with a man.

**MAGDALENA:** And such a handsome man.

**ANGUSTIAS:** His figure’s not bad.

**LA PONCIA:** That’s how it is between people who have a little experience, who know how to speak and wave their hands about...The first time my husband Evaristo el Colorín came to my window...ha, ha, ha!

**AMELIA:** What happened?

**LA PONCIA:** It was quite dark. I saw him there and as he approached he said: ‘Good evening.’ ‘Good evening,’ I said in reply, and then we were silent for half an hour or more. Sweat bathed my whole body. Then Evaristo came closer, closer, as if he wanted to squeeze through the bars, and said in a whisper, ‘Come here, let me feel you!’

*(They all laugh. Amelia rises, runs to the door, and peers out.)*

**AMELIA:** Ay! I thought mother was coming.

**MAGDALENA:** Then we'd have been for it! *(They continue laughing.)*

**AMELIA:** Shush...she'll hear us!

**LA PONCIA:** Afterwards he behaved very well. Instead of chasing after other things he bred linnets till the day of his death. It's good for you single women to know that a fortnight after the wedding a man forgoes bed for the table, and later on the table for the tavern. And the woman who can't accept it will waste away, crying in a corner.

**AMELIA:** You accepted it.

**LA PONCIA:** I could handle him!

**MARTIRIO:** Is it true you struck him on occasions?

**LA PONCIA:** Yes, and nearly blinded him.

**MAGDALENA:** That's how all women should behave!

**LA PONCIA:** I'm of your mother's school. One day he said something to me, who knows what, and I slaughtered all his linnets with the rolling pin. *(They laugh.)*

**MAGDALENA:** Adela, child, the things you're missing.

**AMELIA:** Adela. *(Pause.)*

**MAGDALENA:** I'll go and find her! *(She exits.)*

**LA PONCIA:** The child is ill!

**MARTIRIO:** Of course, she barely sleeps!

**LA PONCIA:** What does she do instead?

**MARTIRIO:** How do I know what she does!

**LA PONCIA:** You know better than I, you only have a wall between you.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Envy is eating her.

**AMELIA:** Don't exaggerate things.

**ANGUSTIAS:** I can see it in her eyes. She's beginning to look like a madwoman.

**MARTIRIO:** Don't talk about madness. This is the one place where such words should not be spoken.

*(Magdalena enters with Adela.)*

**MAGDALENA:** You weren't asleep, then?

**ADELA:** I felt unwell.

**MARTIRIO:** *(Pointedly)* Didn't you sleep well last night?

**ADELA:** Yes.

**MARTIRIO:** Then?

**ADELA:** *(Angrily)* Leave me alone! Sleeping or waking, it's nobody's affair but mine! I'll do as I want with my own body!

**MARTIRIO:** I'm merely concerned for you!

**ADELA:** Concerned, or inquisitive. Weren't you sewing just now? Well carry on. I wish I were invisible, so as to walk through these rooms without you forever asking where I'm going!

**SERVANT:** *(Entering)* Bernarda is asking for you. The man with the lace is here.

*(They exit, and as they do so Martirio looks fixedly at Adela.)*

**ADELA:** Stop staring at me! If you want you can have my eyes, that are hardly used, and my shoulders to bear that hump you carry, but turn your head away when I pass.

*(Martirio exits.)*

**LA PONCIA:** Adela, she's your sister, and the one that loves you most!

**ADELA:** She follows me everywhere. She even looks into my room to see if I'm asleep. She doesn't let me breathe. And always it's: 'What a shame about that pretty face! What a shame about that body, that no one will ever see!' It's not so! My body will be for whomever I want!

**LA PONCIA:** *(Pointedly in a low voice)* For Pepe el Romano, is that it?

**ADELA:** *(Startled)* What do you mean?

**LA PONCIA:** What I say, Adela!

**ADELA:** Be silent!

**LA PONCIA:** *(Loudly)* Did you think I hadn't noticed?

**ADELA:** Lower your voice!

**LA PONCIA:** Suppress such thoughts!

**ADELA:** What do you know about it?

**LA PONCIA:** Old women can see through walls. Where do you go at night when you get up?

**ADELA:** You should have your eyes put out!

**LA PONCIA:** My hands are as full of eyes as my head when it comes to this business. For all my thinking about it I don't know what you're up to. Why else were you standing there half-naked at the window with the light on when Pepe was here the second time he came to talk with your sister?

**ADELA:** That's not true!

**LA PONCIA:** Don't be such a child! Let your sister be, and if it's Pepe el Romano you want, reconcile yourself. (*Adela weeps.*) Besides, who says you can't marry him? Your sister Angustias is not well. She won't survive her first child. She's narrow-waisted and old, and from my experience I'd say she'll die. Then Pepe will do what all the widowers here do: he'll marry the youngest and prettiest, and that's you. Cling to that hope and forget him for now. Do what you like, but don't act against the law of God.

**ADELA:** Be silent!

**LA PONCIA:** I won't be silent!

**ADELA:** Mind your own business, you nosy traitor!

**LA PONCIA:** I shall be your shadow!

**ADELA:** Instead of cleaning the house and praying for the dead when you go to bed, you go around like an old sow poking around in men and women's business, so you can slobber over it.

**LA PONCIA:** I keep watch, so that people won't spit when they pass this door!

**ADELA:** What vast affection you suddenly feel for my sister!

**LA PONCIA:** I've no loyalty to any of you, but I want to live in a decent house. I don't want my old age to be tarnished.

**ADELA:** Your advice is useless. It's too late. I'd not just ignore you, but also my mother, in order to quench this fire that licks me from head to foot. What can you say of me? That I lock myself in my room and won't open the door? That I don't sleep? I'm cleverer than you. See if you can catch this hare in your hands.

**LA PONCIA:** Don't defy me, Adela, don't defy me! Because I can shout out loud, light all the lamps, and set the bells ringing.

**ADELA:** Bring four thousand yellow flares, and set them up on the walls of the stable-yard. No one can escape the fact that what is to happen will happen.

**LA PONCIA:** You want the man as much as that!

**ADELA:** Yes, as much as that! Gazing into his eyes I feel as if I'm slowly drinking his blood.

**LA PONCIA:** I won't listen to you.

**ADELA:** You'll listen! I was afraid of you. But now I'm stronger than you!

*(Angustias enters.)*

**ANGUSTIAS:** Forever arguing!

**LA PONCIA:** Of course. In all this heat she insists I go and fetch her something from the store.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Did you buy that bottle of scent for me?

**LA PONCIA:** The dearest one: and the powder. I've put them on the table in your room.

*(Angustias exits.)*

**ADELA:** Not a word!

**LA PONCIA:** We'll see about that!

*(Martirio, Amelia and Magdalena enter.)*

**MAGDALENA:** *(To Adela)* Have you seen the lace?

**AMELIA:** The lace for Angustias' wedding sheets is beautiful.

**ADELA:** *(To Martirio, who is holding some lace)* And that?

**MARTIRIO:** It's for me. For a petticoat.

**ADELA:** *(Sarcastically)* One has to have a sense of humour!

**MARTIRIO:** *(Pointedly)* For my own eyes. I don't need to show off to anyone.

**LA PONCIA:** No one sees you in your petticoat.

**MARTIRIO:** *(Pointedly looking at Adela)* Sometimes they do! But I adore underwear. If I were rich I'd have it of finest linen. It's one of the few pleasures left to me.

**LA PONCIA:** This lace is fine for a baby's bonnet or for a christening gown. I could never dress mine in it. Let's see if Angustias can hers. If she starts having children you'll be sewing day and night.

**MAGDALENA:** I've no intention of sewing a stitch.

**AMELIA:** Much less look after someone else's children. Look at the neighbours down the street, martyrs to four little idiots.

**LA PONCIA:** They're better off than you are. At least they have a laugh and you can hear them fighting!

**MARTIRIO:** Then go and serve them.

**LA PONCIA:** No. I've been sent to serve in this convent!

*(Distant bells are heard, as if through several walls.)*

**MAGDALENA:** It's the men going back to work.

**LA PONCIA:** It struck three a moment ago.

**MARTIRIO:** In this heat!

**ADELA:** *(Sitting down)* Oh, if I could only be out in the fields too!

**MAGDALENA:** *(Sitting down)* Each class to its own!

**MARTIRIO:** *(Sitting down)* That's so!

**AMELIA:** *(Sitting down)* Ay!

**LA PONCIA:** There's nothing like being in the fields at this time of year. Yesterday morning the harvesters arrived. Forty or fifty strapping men.

**MAGDALENA:** Where have they come from this year?

**LA PONCIA:** From a long way off. They're from the mountains. A happy crowd! Like sun-scorched trees! Shouting and throwing stones! Last night a woman with a sequined dress arrived in the village and danced to an accordion, and fifteen of the men hired her and took her off to the olive grove. I watched them from a distance. The one who organised the hiring was a young man with green eyes, lean as a sheaf of wheat.

**AMELIA:** Is that a fact?

**ADELA:** Well, it's possible!

**LA PONCIA:** Years ago one of these women came here and I gave her money myself so my eldest could go with her. Men must do these things!

**ADELA:** Everything is forgiven them.

**AMELIA:** To be born a woman is the great crime.

**MAGDALENA:** Not even our eyes are our own.

*(The sound of singing is heard in the distance. It draws nearer.)*

**LA PONCIA:** That's them. They have some fine songs.

**AMELIA:** They're off to the reaping, now.

**CHORUS:** The reapers are leaving,  
they're off to the reaping,  
and with them the hearts  
of all the girls watching.

*(Tambourines, and carrañacas – traditional instruments, small wooden or metal plates scraped with sticks – are heard. Pause. All the women listen, in a silence pierced by sunlight.)*

**AMELIA:** The heat doesn't bother them.

**MARTIRIO:** They reap amidst the fiery rays.

**ADELA:** I'd like to be a reaper so I could come and go at will. Then I'd be able to forget what's gnawing at us.

**MARTIRIA:** What is it you need to forget?

**ADELA:** Each of us has something.

**MARTIRIO:** *(With feeling)* Each of us!

**LA PONCIA:** Hush! Hush!

**CHORUS:** (*Far off*)

You girls there from the village  
open your doors and windows;  
the reaper wants your roses  
to brighten his sombrero.

**LA PONCIA:** What a song!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Nostalgically*)

You girls there from the village  
open your doors and windows...

**ADELA:** (*Passionately*)

...the reaper wants your roses  
to brighten his sombrero.

*(The sound of the singing grows fainter.)*

**LA PONCIA:** They're turning the corner now.

**ADELA:** Let's go and watch them from the window of my room.

**LA PONCIA:** Take care not to open it too wide, because they're up to shoving at it to see who's looking at them.

*(The three of them leave. Martirio remains seated on the low chair with her head in her hands.)*

**AMELIA:** (*Approaching*) What is it?

**MARTIRIO:** The heat is making me ill.

**AMELIA:** No more than that?

**MARTIRIO:** I wish it was November, with days of rain and frost; anything but this interminable summer.

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**AMELIA:** It will pass and return again.

**MARTIRIO:** Of course! *(Pause)* What time did you go to sleep last night?

**AMELIA:** I don't know. I sleep like a log. Why?

**MARTIRIO:** Nothing, only I thought I heard someone in the stable yard.

**AMELIA:** You did?

**MARTIRIO:** Very late.

**AMELIA:** And you weren't scared?

**MARTIRIO:** No. I've heard it on other nights.

**AMELIA:** We should be on guard. Might it have been the farmhands?

**MARTIRIO:** The farmhands aren't here till six.

**AMELIA:** Perhaps a young mule that needs breaking in.

**MARTIRIO:** *(In a low voice, full of hidden meaning)* Ah, yes! A young mule, one that needs breaking in.

**AMELIA:** We should warn the others.

**MARTIRIO:** No! No, say nothing. It's probably my imagination.

**AMELIA:** Perhaps.

*(Pause. Amelia starts to leave.)*

**MARTIRIO:** Amelia.

**AMELIA:** *(In the doorway)* What is it?

*(Pause)*

**MARTIRIO:** Nothing.

*(Pause)*

**AMELIA:** Why did you call to me?

*(Pause)*

**MARTIRIO:** It slipped out. It was unintentional.

*(Pause)*

**AMELIA:** Go and lie down for a while.

**ANGUSTIAS:** *(Entering angrily in a way which creates a sharp contrast with the previous pauses.)* Where is the photograph of Pepe that was under my pillow? Which of you has it?

**MARTIRIO:** Neither of us.

**AMELIA:** It's not as if Pepe was a silver Saint Bartholomew.

*(La Poncia, Magdalena and Adela enter.)*

**ANGUSTIAS:** Where is the photo?

**ADELA:** What photo?

**ANGUSTIAS:** One of you has hidden it.

**MAGDALENA:** How dare you say that to us?

**ANGUSTIAS:** It was in my room and now it's not.

**MARTIRIO:** Maybe it slipped out to the stable yard in the night? Pepe likes to stroll in the moonlight.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Don't waste your wit on me! When he comes I'll tell him.

**LA PONCIA:** No, don't do that! It will turn up! (*Looking at Adela*)

**ANGUSTIAS:** I want to know which one of you has it!

**ADELA:** (*Looking at Martirio*) Someone does! But not me!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Pointedly*) Naturally!

**BERNARDA:** (*Entering leaning on her stick*) What's this noise in my house amidst all this stifling silence? The neighbours must have their ears glued to the walls.

**ANGUSTIAS:** They've stolen my fiancé's photograph.

**BERNARDA:** (*Fiercely*) Who has? Who?

**ANGUSTIAS:** They have!

**BERNARDA:** Which of you was it? (*Silence*) Answer me. (*Silence. To La Poncia*) Search their rooms, and their beds. This is what comes of not keeping you all on a tighter leash. But I'll haunt your dreams! (*To Angustias.*) Are you sure?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Yes.

**BERNARDA:** You've searched for it properly?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Yes, Mother.

(*They are all standing. An awkward silence ensues.*)

**BERNARDA:** At my time of life, you'd make me drink the bitterest venom a mother has to swallow. (*To La Poncia, entering*) You found it?

**LA PONCIA:** Here it is.

**BERNARDA:** Where did you find it?

**LA PONCIA:** It was...

**BERNARDA:** Don't be afraid to say.

**LA PONCIA:** (*Surprised*) Between the sheets of Martirio's bed.

**BERNARDA:** (*To Martirio*) Is that true?

**MARTIRIO:** It's true.

**BERNARDA:** (*Advancing and striking her with her stick*) May you be cut to pieces, you good-for-nothing! You sower of discord!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Angrily*) Don't you hit me, Mother!

**BERNARDA:** As much as I want!

**MARTIRIO:** If I let you! Do you hear? Get away from me!

**LA PONCIA:** Show your mother some respect.

**ANGUSTIAS:** (*Restraining Bernarda*) Leave her alone. Please!

**BERNARDA:** Not a tear in her eyes.

**MARTIRIO:** I'll not cry just to please you.

**BERNARDA:** Why did you take the photo?

**MARTIRIO:** Can't I even play a joke on my sister? Why else would I want it?

**ADELA:** (*Jealously*) This was no joke: you've never liked jokes. It was something else in you seeking expression. Out with it now.

**MARTIRIO:** Be quiet, and don't make me talk, because if I do the walls will close in from shame!

**ADELA:** An evil tongue never stops inventing things!

**BERNARDA:** Adela!

**MAGDALENA:** You're both mad.

**AMELIA:** And thinking evil thoughts about us.

**MARTIRIO:** Others do worse things than that.

**ADELA:** Until they strip them naked and throw them in the river.

**BERNARDA:** Wicked girl!

**ANGUSTIAS:** It's not my fault that Pepe el Romana fell for me.

**ADELA:** For your money!

**ANGUSTIAS:** Mother!

**BERNARDA:** Silence!

**MARTIRIO:** For your fields, and your orchards.

**MAGDALENA:** That's right!

**BERNARDA:** Silence, I said! I knew the storm was coming, but I didn't expect it so soon. Ay! What a shower of stones rains down on my heart! But I'm not an old woman yet and I've haltered for all five of you and this house that my father built so that not even the weeds will know my desolation. Get out of here!

*(They leave. Bernarda sits desolate. La Poncia stands near the wall. Bernarda composes herself, bangs her stick down and speaks)*

I shall have to take a firm grip! Remember, Bernarda, it's your duty!

**LA PONCIA:** Can I say something?

**BERNARDA:** Speak. I'm sorry you had to hear that. It's not good to have an outsider mixed up in family matters.

**LA PONCIA:** What I've seen, I've seen.

**BERNARDA:** Angustias must get married at once.

**LA PONCIA:** You must get her away from here.

**BERNARDA:** Not her. Him!

**LA PONCIA:** Yes, you must get him away from here! A good thought.

**BERNARDA:** I don't think. There are things you can't and shouldn't think about. I command.

**LA PONCIA:** And you think he'll be prepared to go?

**BERNARDA:** (*Rising*) What's going on in that head of yours?

**LA PONCIA:** Of course he'll marry Angustias!

**BERNARDA:** Say it. I know you well enough to spot when you're ready to stab with your knife.

**LA PONCIA:** I've never considered a warning to be murder.

**BERNARDA:** You're going to warn me of something?

**LA PONCIA:** I'm not accusing you of anything, Bernarda. I'm merely saying: open your eyes and see.

**BERNARDA:** And what is there to see?

**LA PONCIA:** You've always been sharp. You can see the evil in people a hundred miles off. I've often thought you can read others' minds. But it's different with your daughters. Now you're blind.

**BERNARDA:** You mean Martirio?

**LA PONCIA:** Indeed, Martirio... (*Expressing curiosity*) Why did she hide the photo?

**BERNARDA:** (*Protective of her daughter*) After all she says it was just a joke. What else could it be?

**LA PONCIA:** (*Sarcastically*) You believe that?

**BERNARDA:** (*Energetically*) No I don't. You're right!

**LA PONCIA:** Fair enough, it's your family. But if it was the neighbour across the street, what then?

**BERNARDA:** Now you're beginning to twist the knife.

**LA PONCIA:** (*With sustained cruelty*) No Bernarda; something serious is in the wind here. I don't wish to blame you, but you've not allowed your daughters their freedom. Martirio is made to fall in love readily, whatever you may say. Why didn't you let her marry Enrique Humanes? Why on the very day he was going to come to her window did you send him a message not to come?

**BERNARDA:** (*Forcefully*) I'd do it a thousand times over! My blood will not mix with that of the Humanes family as long as I live! His father was a farmhand.

**LA PONCIA:** And this is what your pride has brought you to!

**BERNARDA:** I'm proud because I've a right to be. And you haven't, since you know very well what you come from.

**LA PONCIA:** (*With hatred*) Don't remind me! I'm old now, and I've always been grateful for your protection.

**BERNARDA:** (*Imperiously*) It doesn't seem like it!

**BERNARDA:** And if she doesn't the worse for her. I don't think there is 'something serious' going on here. Nothing's going on here. It's only what you'd like to be happening! And if anything does be sure it won't escape these walls.

**LA PONCIA:** I don't know about that! There are those in the village who can also read hidden thoughts from afar.

**BERNARDA:** How you'd love to see me and my daughters on the road to the nearest brothel!

**LA PONCIA:** No one knows where anyone will end up.

**BERNARDA:** I know what my end will be! I and my daughters! The brothel was fitting for a certain dead woman...

**LA PONCIA:** (*Fiercely*) Bernarda! Respect my mother's memory!

**BERNARDA:** Then don't persecute me with your evil thoughts!

(*Pause*)

**LA PONCIA:** It's better if I have nothing to do with it.

**BERNARDA:** That's what you should do. Work and keep silent about things. That's the duty of anyone who's paid to work.

**LA PONCIA:** But I can't. Do you think Martirio is better suited to marry Pepe than...say Adela?

**BERNARDA:** I don't see why.

**LA PONCIA:** (*Pointedly*) Adela. She was made to be a Romano's fiancé!

**BERNARDA:** Things are never as we'd wish them.

**LA PONCIA:** But it's hard to go against one's true inclinations. It seems wrong to me that Pepe is with Angustias, and it seems wrong to others too, and even to Nature herself. Who knows whether they'll pay for it somehow!

**BERNARDA:** Here we go again...You slip things in to give me bad dreams. And I don't want to listen to you, because if I did understand all you were saying I'd be tempted to scratch your eyes out.

**LA PONCIA:** It won't come to it!

**BERNARDA:** Fortunately my daughters respect me, and have never gone against my wishes!

**LA PONCIA:** That's so! But as soon as you let them free they'll be climbing the roof.

**BERNARDA:** I'll hurl stones to bring them down again!

**LA PONCIA:** You've always been the pluckiest!

**BERNARDA:** I was always a fiery one!

**LA PONCIA:** But it's strange how things turn out! At her age: you should see Angustias' enthusiasm for this fiancé of hers! And he seems taken with her too! My son told me that yesterday when he went past with the oxen at four thirty in the morning, they were still talking.

**BERNARDA:** At four thirty!

**ANGUSTIAS:** (*Entering*) That's a lie!

**LA PONCIA:** That's what they told me.

**BERNARDA:** (*To Angustias*) Well?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Pepe has been leaving at one, for more than a week. God strike me dead if I'm lying.

**MARTIRIO:** (*Entering*) I heard him leaving at four as well.

**BERNARDA:** But did you see him with your own eyes?

**MARTIRIO:** I didn't want to look out. Don't you talk to him from the window in the alleyway?

**ANGUSTIAS:** No, I talk to him from my bedroom window.

(*Adela appears in the doorway*)

**MARTIRIO:** Then...

**BERNARDA:** What has been going on here?

**LA PONCIA:** Beware what you might find! Anyway, it's clear that Pepe was at one of the windows at four in the morning.

**BERNARDA:** You know that for certain?

**LA PONCIA:** Nothing's certain in this life.

**ADELA:** Mother, don't listen to her: she wants to destroy us all.

**BERNARDA:** I'll find out for myself! If the people in this village want to make false accusations they'll find me hard as rock. We'll not speak of this any more. Sometimes people will throw mud at others to destroy them.

**MARTIRIO:** I've no wish to tell lies.

**LA PONCIA:** There must be something in it.

**BERNARDA:** There's nothing in it. I was born with my eyes open. And they'll stay open till the day I die.

**ANGUSTIAS:** I have a right to know what's going on.

**BERNARDA:** Your only right is that of obedience. Nobody tells me what to do. *(To La Poncia)* And you: keep to your own affairs. No one will take a step here without my knowing!

**SERVANT:** *(Entering)* There's a big crowd at the top of the street and all the neighbours are at their doors!

**BERNARDA:** *(To La Poncia)* Run, and see what's happening! *(The women start to run off)* Where are you going? I always knew you were the sort of women who can't wait to display themselves at windows, and break your mourning vow. All of you, to the courtyard!

*(They leave as does Bernarda. Distant murmurs are heard. Martirio and Adela enter and stand listening, not daring to take another step towards the exit.)*

**MARTIRIO:** Be grateful I kept my tongue in check.

**ADELA:** I could have spoken too.

**MARTIRIO:** And what would you have said? To wish is not to do!

**ADELA:** The one who does is the one who can, and who gets there first. You wished but you couldn't have him.

**MARTIRIO:** You won't have him much longer.

**ADELA:** I'll have him all to myself!

**MARTIRIO:** I'll snatch him from your arms!

**ADELA:** *(Pleading)* Martirio, let us alone!

**MARTIRIO:** Never!

**ADELA:** He wants me to live with him!

**MARTIRIO:** I saw him embrace you!

**ADELA:** I didn't want him to. It's as if I was dragged along by a rope.

**MARTIRIO:** I'll see you dead first!

*(Magdalena and Angustias appear. The noise outside increases.)*

**LA PONCIA:** *(Entering with Bernarda)* Bernarda!

**BERNARDA:** What's going on?

**LA PONCIA:** Librada's daughter, the unmarried one, has had a daughter and no one knows who the father is.

**ADELA:** A child?

**LA PONCIA:** And to hide her shame she killed it, and buried it under some rocks; but the dogs, with more heart than many a human creature, dug it up and, as if guided by God's hand, left it on her doorstep. Now people want to kill her. They're dragging her down the street, and there are men running along the paths, and out of the olive-groves, shouting loud enough to make the earth tremble.

**BERNARDA:** That's right, let them bring olive branches and pick-handles, and let them kill her.

**ADELA:** No, no, not kill her!

**MARTIRIO:** Yes, and let us go see.

**BERNARDA:** And may she who tramples on her honour pay the price.

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*(A woman's cry and a great uproar are heard outside.)*

**ADELA:** Let them only release her! Don't go outside!

**MARTIRIO:** *(Gazing at Adela)* May she pay what she owes!

**BERNARDA:** *(In the archway)* Finish her off before the police come! A burning coal in the place of her sin!

**ADELA:** *(Clutching her belly)* No! No!

**BERNARDA:** Kill her! Kill her!

*Curtain*

### ACT III



*(Four white walls, bathed in pale blue light, in the internal courtyard of Bernarda's house. It is night. The setting should be utterly simple. The doorways, illuminated by interior lighting, cast a bright glow on the stage. In the centre a table with an oil lamp, at which Bernarda and her daughters are eating. La Poncia is serving them. Prudencia is seated apart. As the curtain rises there is a complete silence, broken only by the sound of plates and cutlery.)*

**PRUDENCIA:** I should go. It's been a long visit. *(She rises.)*

**BERNARDA:** Stay. We never see each other.

**PRUDENCIA:** Has the last bell for the rosary sounded?

**LA PONCIA:** Not yet.

*(Prudencia sits down.)*

**BERNARDA:** And how is your husband?

**PRUDENCIA:** The same.

**BERNARDA:** We never see him either.

**PRUDENCIA:** You know what he's like. Since he quarrelled with his brothers over the inheritance he never goes out the front door, he uses a ladder and climbs over the wall by the stable-yard.

**BERNARDA:** So like a man. And your daughter...?

**PRUDENCIA:** He hasn't forgiven her.

**BERNARDA:** He's right.

**PRUDENCIA:** I don't know what to say. It makes me suffer.

**BERNARDA:** A disobedient daughter ceases to be your daughter and instead becomes your enemy.

**PRUDENCIA:** I let it flow over me. The only comfort I have is to take refuge in the church, but now I'm losing my sight I'll have to stop going so the children won't mock at me. (*A heavy blow against the wall is heard.*) What was that?

**BERNARDA:** The stallion, he's shut in, and kicks at the wall. (*Calling out*) Hobble him, and let him out in the yard! (*In a lower voice*) He must be hot.

**PRUDENCIA:** Are you going to let him loose on the new mares?

**BERNARDA:** At dawn.

**PRUDENCIA:** You've done well to increase your stable.

**BERNARDA:** By dint of pain and money.

**LA PONCIA:** (*Interrupting*) And now she's got the best stable in the region!  
It's a shame prices are so low.

**BERNARDA:** Would you like some honey and cheese?

**PRUDENCIA:** I don't feel like eating.

(*Another blow is heard.*)

**LA PONCIA:** Dear God!

**PRUDENCIA:** That went straight to my heart!

**BERNARDA:** (*Rising angrily*) Do I have to say everything twice? Let him out to roll in the straw! (*She pauses, and as if speaking to the stable lads*) Shut the mares in the stable, but let him out, before he brings the wall down. (*She goes back to the table and sits down*) Ay, what a life!

**PRUDENCIA:** You have to do a man's work.

**BERNARDA:** That's right. (*Adela gets up from the table*) Where are you going?

**ADELA:** For a drink of water.

**BERNARDA:** (*Calling*) Bring a jug of fresh water. (*To Adela*) You can sit down. (*Adela sits*)

**PRUDENCIA:** And Angustias, when does she get married?

**BERNARDA:** They'll ask for her hand in three days time.

**PRUDENCIA:** You must be very happy!

**ANGUSTIAS:** Of course!

**AMELIA:** (*To Magdalena*) Now, you've spilt the salt!

**MAGDALENA:** Things can't be worse for you than they are already.

**PRUDENCIA:** It always brings bad luck.

**BERNARDA:** Enough of that!

**PRUDENCIA:** (*To Angustias*) Has he given you the ring yet?

**ANGUSTIAS:** (*Displaying it*) See for yourself.

**PRUDENCIA:** It's beautiful. Three pearls. In my day pearls signified tears.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Well times have changed.

**ADELA:** I don't think so. Such things mean the same. An engagement ring should be set with diamonds.

**PRUDENCIA:** That's more appropriate.

**BERNARDA:** With pearls or without them, it's what you make of things.

**MARTIRIO:** Or what God makes of them.

**PRUDENCIA:** They tell me your furniture is fine too.

**BERNARDA:** It's cost me a small fortune.

**LA PONCIA:** (*Intervening*) The best piece is the wardrobe, with a mirror.

**PRUDENCIA:** I've never seen a wardrobe with a mirror.

**BERNARDA:** All we had was a chest.

**PRUDENCIA:** What's important is that everything works out for the best.

**ADELA:** One can never tell.

**BERNARDA:** There's no reason why it shouldn't.

*(The distant sound of bells is heard.)*

**PRUDENCIA:** The last call. *(To Angustias)* I'll visit again so you can show me your trousseau.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Whenever you wish.

**PRUDENCIA:** God give us goodnight.

**BERNARDA:** Goodbye, Prudencia.

**THE FIVE DAUGHTERS:** God go with you.

*(Pause. Prudencia exits.)*

**BERNARDA:** We've finished. *(They rise.)*

**ADELA:** I'm going to the main door to stretch my legs and get some air.

*(Magdalena sits down in a low chair against the wall.)*

**AMELIA:** I'll go with you.

**MARTIRIO:** And I.

**ADELA:** *(With suppressed hatred)* I won't get lost.

**AMELIA:** Darkness begs company.

*(They leave. Bernarda sits. Angustias is clearing the table.)*

**BERNARDA:** I've told you, I want you to talk to your sister Martirio. What happened with the photograph was a joke and should be forgotten.

**ANGUSTIAS:** You know she doesn't like me.

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**BERNARDA:** Each sees into their own heart. I never pry into hearts, but I desire a united front and family harmony. Do you understand?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Yes.

**BERNARDA:** Then that's fine.

**MAGDALENA:** (*Half-asleep*) Anyway, you'll have left here before you know it!  
(*She falls asleep*)

**ANGUSTIAS:** Not soon enough.

**BERNARDA:** What time did you finish talking last night?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Twelve-thirty.

**BERNARDA:** What does Pepe have to say?

**ANGUSTIAS:** He seems distracted. He talks to me as if he's thinking of something else. If I ask him what's on his mind, he just says: 'We men have our own worries.'

**BERNARDA:** You shouldn't ask him; that's even more true when you're married. Speak if he speaks, and look at him when he looks at you. You'll be better off that way.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Mother, I think he hides a great deal from me.

**BERNARDA:** Don't try and find out what it is, don't question him, and, above all, don't let him ever see you cry.

**ANGUSTIAS:** I should be happy and I'm not.

**BERNARDA:** It's no matter.

**ANGUSTIAS:** I often gaze at Pepe through the bars of the window, and his image is blurred, as if he were cloaked in a shroud of dust thrown up by his sheep.

**BERNARDA:** You're not well, that's all.

**ANGUSTIAS:** I hope it's that!

**BERNARDA:** Is he here tonight?

**ANGUSTIAS:** No. He's gone to the city with his mother.

**BERNARDA:** Then we'll retire early. Magdalena!

**ANGUSTIAS:** She's asleep.

*(Adela, Martirio and Amelia enter.)*

**AMELIA:** What a dark night!

**ADELA:** You can't see two feet in front of you.

**MARTIRIO:** A fine night for thieves, or for someone who needs to hide.

**ADELA:** The stallion was in the centre of the yard. So white! Twice as big, and filling the darkness.

**AMELIA:** That's right. He was frightening. Like a phantom!

**ADELA:** The sky is filled with fistfuls of stars.

**MARTIRIO:** She stared at them so hard she almost strained her neck.

**ADELA:** Don't you love them too?

**MARTIRIO:** What happens above the rooftops means nothing to me. What goes on inside these four walls is enough for me.

**ADELA:** That's typical.

**BERNARDA:** She has her ways as you have yours.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Good night.

**ADELA:** You're off to bed already?

**ANGUSTIAS:** Yes, Pepe's not here tonight. (*She exits.*)

**ADELA:** Mother, when a meteor passes, or there's a flash of lightning, why do people say:  
Blessed Santa Barbara  
in the sky with paper  
you're writ, and holy water?

**BERNARDA:** In past days they knew many things that we've forgotten.

**AMELIA:** I shut my eyes so as not to see them.

**ADELA:** I don't. I like to see things flash out fire that have been dormant for years and years.

**MARTIRIO:** Those things have nothing to do with us.

**BERNARDA:** And it's best not to think of them.

**ADELA:** What a beautiful night! I'd like to stay up late to catch the breeze from the fields.

**BERNARDA:** But it's time for bed. Magdalena!

**AMELIA:** She's fast asleep.

**BERNARDA:** Magdalena!

**MAGDALENA:** (*Annoyed*) Leave me in peace!

**BERNARDA:** It's time for bed!

**MAGDALENA:** (*Rising in a bad mood*) You can't let anyone alone! (*She exits muttering*)

**AMELIA:** Good night. (*She exits.*)

**BERNARDA:** You two, go on now.

**MARTIRIO:** Why isn't Angustias' fiancé coming by tonight?

**BERNARDA:** He's away.

**MARTIRIO:** (*Looking at Adela*) Ah!

**ADELA:** Till the morning. (*She exits*)

(*Martirio has a drink of water and exits slowly looking towards the door of the stable-yard. La Poncia enters.*)

**LA PONCIA:** You're still here?

**BERNARDA:** Enjoying the silence and unable to understand what this 'serious thing' is that's supposed to be going on here.

**LA PONCIA:** Bernarda, forget about it.

**BERNARDA:** Everything is as it should be in this house. My vigilance guards against all.

**LA PONCIA:** Nothing you can see, that's true. Your daughters live as though they were shut in a cupboard. But neither you nor anyone else can see inside someone's heart.

**BERNARDA:** My daughters can breathe tranquility.

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**LA PONCIA:** That matters to you because you're their mother. I've enough to do looking after this house.

**BERNARDA:** So you're saying nothing.

**LA PONCIA:** I keep to my place, in peace.

**BERNARDA:** The fact is there's nothing to say. If there was grass here you'd be the first to let the neighbours' sheep in to graze.

**LA PONCIA:** I conceal more than you think.

**BERNARDA:** Has your son seen Pepe here again at four in the morning? Are people still repeating a litany of lies against this house?

**LA PONCIA:** No one says a thing.

**BERNARDA:** Because they can't, because there's nothing for them to sink their teeth into. My vigilance has seen to that!

**LA PONCIA:** I don't want to say anything, Bernarda, because I don't know what you're after. But don't be so certain.

**BERNARDA:** I'm utterly certain!

**LA PONCIA:** Perhaps a lightning bolt will suddenly strike you! Perhaps a blood clot will suddenly block your heart!

**BERNARDA:** Nothing will happen. I'm alert to all your suspicions.

**LA PONCIA:** All the better for you then.

**BERNARDA:** Certainly!

**SERVANT:** (*Entering*) I've finished washing the dishes. Do you need anything else, Bernarda?

**BERNARDA:** (*Rising*) Nothing. I'm going to bed.

**LA PONCIA:** What time do you want me to call you?

**BERNARDA:** Don't bother. I'll sleep well tonight. (*She exits.*)

**LA PONCIA:** When you can't fight the tide, the easiest thing is to turn your back on it.

**SERVANT:** She's so full of pride she has a mote in her eye.

**LA PONCIA:** I can't do anything about it. I want to stop things before they go any further, but they frighten me too much. You hear this silence? Yet there are storms brewing in each of these rooms. The day they break out they'll sweep us all away. I've had my say.

**SERVANT:** Bernarda thinks no one can match her, but she doesn't know the effect a man can have on a house full of single women.

**LA PONCIA:** It's not all Pepe el Romano's fault. It's true that last year he was after Adela, and she was mad about him, but she should have kept to herself and not incited him. A man is a man,

**SERVANT:** Some say he's been talking with Adela too often at night.

**LA PONCIA:** They're right. (*Whispering*) And there have been other things.

**SERVANT:** I don't know what will happen here.

**LA PONCIA:** I'd like to cross the water and leave this warring house.

**SERVANT:** Bernarda is hastening the wedding on, and maybe nothing will happen.

**LA PONCIA:** Things have already gone too far. Adela is determined, while the others keep watch on her all the time.

**SERVANT:** Martirio too?

**LA PONCIA:** She's the worst. She's a poisonous well. She knows Pepe is not for her and she'd drown the world if she could so no one else should have him.

**SERVANT:** They're wicked girls!

**LA PONCIA:** They're women without a man that's all. In such cases even blood ties are forgotten. Shhh! (*She listens*)

**SERVANT:** What is it?

**LA PONCIA:** (*Rising*) The dogs are barking.

**SERVANT:** Someone must have passed the door.

(*Adela enters in white bodice and petticoat.*)

**LA PONCIA:** Haven't you been to bed?

**ADELA:** I wanted a drink of water. (*She drinks from a glass on the table.*)

**LA PONCIA:** I thought you were asleep.

**ADELA:** I was thirsty. And you two: aren't you going to bed?

**SERVANT:** Shortly.

(*Adela leaves.*)

**LA PONCIA:** Let's be gone.

**SERVANT:** We've earned our sleep. All day, Bernarda never lets me rest.

**LA PONCIA:** Bring the lamp.

**SERVANT:** The dogs are barking like mad things.

**LA PONCIA:** They'll stop us sleeping.

*(They leave. The stage is almost dark. María Josefa enters carrying a lamb in her arms.)*

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** Little lamb, my little one,  
we'll go, down to the sea.  
The little ant shall open his door,  
I shall give you milk and more.  
Bernarda,  
leopard-face.  
Magdalena  
she-hyena.  
Little lamb!  
Baa, baa.  
Flowers there'll be at Bethlehem Gate.

*(She laughs.)*

You and I don't want to sleep.  
By itself the door will open  
we'll hide along the shore  
deep inside a reef of coral.  
Bernarda,  
Leopard-face.  
Magdalena,  
she-hyena.  
Baa, baa.  
Flowers there'll be at Bethlehem Gate.

*(She goes out singing. Adela enters. She looks around her carefully, and vanishes through the door to the stable-yard. Martirio enters through another door and stands centre-stage in a state of agonised alertness. She is also in her petticoat. She has covered herself with a waist-length black shawl. María Josefa enters.)*

**MARTIRIO:** Grandmother, where do you think you're going?

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** Are you going to open the door for me? Who are you?

**MARTIRIO:** What are you doing here?

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** I escaped. Who are you?

**MARTIRIO:** Go to bed.

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** You're Martirio, I see that now. Martirio: with the face of a martyr. When are you going to have a child? This is mine.

**MARTIRIO:** Where did you find the lamb?

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** I know it's a lamb, but why shouldn't a lamb be a child? It's better to have a lamb than nothing at all. Bernarda with a leopard's face: Magdalena with a hyena's.

**MARTIRIO:** Don't raise your voice.

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** True. It's all quite dark. Because I've white hair you think I can't have a child, but I can: children, children, and more children. This child will be clothed in white, and there'll be another child and another and they'll all be snow-white, and we'll be like the waves, every one of us. Then we'll know everything, and our heads will be white, and we'll be sea-foam. Why is there no sea-foam here? Here there are only mourning shawls.

**MARTIRIO:** Hush, hush.

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** When my neighbour had a child, I would take it chocolate and afterwards she would bring me some, and so it was, always, always, always. You'll have white hair, but the neighbours won't visit you. I want to take a walk but I'm afraid the dogs will bite me. Will you go with me till we're past the fields? I don't like fields. I like houses, but houses that are wide open, and the women, our neighbours, sleeping in

their beds with their little children, and their men outside sitting on chairs. Pepe el Romano is an ogre. All of you want him. But he'll devour you. Because you're grains of wheat. No, not grains of wheat. Tongueless frogs!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Energetically*) Come, you must go to bed. (*She pushes at her.*)

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** Yes, but you'll let me out later, won't you?

**MARTIRIO:** Of course I will.

**MARÍA JOSEFA:** (*Weeping*) Little lamb, my little one,  
we'll go, down to the sea.  
The little ant shall open his door,  
I shall give you milk and more.

(*She exits. Martirio shuts the door through which she has gone, and moves towards the door to the stable yard. She hesitates then advances a few more steps.*)

**MARTIRIO:** (*Whispering*) Adela. (*Pause. She continues to the door. Loudly*) Adela!

(*Adela appears. Her hair is tousled.*)

**ADELA:** Why are you calling me?

**MARTIRIO:** Leave that man alone!

**ADELA:** Who are you to speak to me like that?

**MARTIRIO:** It's not the role of an honest woman.

**ADELA:** Wouldn't you love to be there yourself!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Loudly*) It's time for me to speak out. This can't go on.

**ADELA:** It's only just beginning. I've had the courage to take what I want. The spirit and power you lack. I've felt death beneath this roof and I'm off to seek what is mine, what belongs to me.

**MARTIRIO:** That man without a soul came here for another woman. You intercepted him.

**ADELA:** He came for the money, but his eyes were on me all the time.

**MARTIRIO:** I won't allow you to take him. He's to marry Angustias.

**ADELA:** You know as well as I he doesn't love her.

**MARTIRIO:** I know.

**ADELA:** You know, because you've seen: he loves me.

**MARTIRIO:** (*Desperately*) Yes.

**ADELA:** (*Coming closer*) He loves me, he loves me.

**MARTIRIO:** Stick a knife in me, if that's what you wish, but don't speak those words again.

**ADELA:** That's why you don't want me to see him. You don't care if he embraces someone he doesn't love. Nor do I. He can live with Angustias for a hundred years. But it's him embracing me that's so terrible for you, because you love him, you love him too!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Dramatically*) Yes! I can say it without shame. Yes! Let my bitter heart split open like a pomegranate. I love him!

**ADELA:** (*Impulsively, moving to embrace her*) Martirio, Martirio, it's not my fault.

**MARTIRIO:** Don't touch me! Don't try to soften my heart. My blood is no longer like yours, and even if I wish to see you as a sister now I only see you as the other woman. (*She pushes her away*)

**ADELA:** There's no remedy here. Whoever must drown will drown. Pepe el Romano is mine. He will take me to the rushes by the shore.

**MARTIRIO:** He will not!

**ADELA:** I can't stand the horror of living under this roof having tasted the sweetness of his mouth. I'll be whatever he wants me to be. With the whole village against me; scorched by their tongues of fire, hounded by those who call themselves decent people, I'll stand before them all with a crown of thorns on my brow, the one that a woman loved by a married man wears.

**MARTIRIO:** Be silent!

**ADELA:** Yes, yes. (*Quietly*) Let's go to sleep, let him marry Angustias. I don't care. I'll go and live in a little house all by myself, where he can see me whenever he wants, when need overcomes him.

**MARTIRIO:** That won't happen as long as I've a drop of blood in my veins.

**ADELA:** Not to you, who are weak: but I can bring a wild stallion to its knees by lifting my little finger.

**MARTIRIO:** Don't raise your voice, it disturbs me. My heart is gripped by so evil a force that, regardless of my wishes, it's smothering me.

**ADELA:** They tell us to love our sisters. God must have abandoned me, in the midst of darkness, because I see you more clearly than ever before.

*(The sound of someone whistling is heard and Adela runs to the door, but Martirio blocks her passage.)*

**MARTIRIO:** Where are you off to?

**ADELA:** Get away from the door!

**MARTIRIO:** Push past me if you can!

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**ADELA:** Away! (*They struggle.*)

**MARTIRIO:** (*Shouting*) Mother! Mother!

**ADELA:** Let me go!

(*Bernarda appears. She is wearing petticoats and a black shawl.*)

**BERNARDA:** Quiet. Quiet. A pity I haven't a lightning bolt in my hand!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Pointing at Adela*) She was with him! Look at her petticoat covered with straw!

**BERNARDA:** A bed of straw is the bed of a whore! (*She approaches Adela angrily.*)

**ADELA:** (*Confronting her*) That's enough of your gaoler's voice! (*She takes hold of her mother's walking stick and breaks it in half.*) That's how I treat the tyrant's rod. Don't take another step. No one but Pepe can command me!

(*Magdalena appears.*)

**MAGDALENA:** Adela!

(*La Poncia and Angustias enter.*)

**ADELA:** I'm his woman. (*To Angustias*) Listen, go into the yard and tell him so. He'll rule this whole household. He's there now, breathing like a lion.

**ANGUSTIAS:** Dear God!

**BERNARDA:** The shotgun! Where's the shotgun? (*She exits in haste*)

(*Amelia enters upstage, looking on in terror, her head against the wall. Martirio exits.*)

**ADELA:** No one can stop me! (*She starts to exit.*)

**ANGUSTIAS:** (*Restraining her*) You'll not leave here in triumph, you thief, to dishonour our house!

**MAGDALENA:** Let her go: so that we'll never have to see her again!

(*A gunshot is heard.*)

**BERNARDA:** (*Entering*) Go on, look for him now if you dare!

**MARTIRIO:** (*Entering*) That's the last of Pepe el Romano.

**ADELA:** Pepe! My God! Pepe! (*She rushes out.*)

**LA PONCIA:** Did you finish him off?

**MARTIRIO:** No! He galloped off on his horse!

**BERNARDA:** It wasn't for want of trying. But we women are poor shots.

**MAGDALENA:** Why say such things, then!

**MARTIRIO:** For her benefit! I'd like to pour a whole river of blood over her head.

**LA PONCIA:** You witch.

**MAGDALENA:** You she-devil!

**BERNARDA:** It's better this way. (*A thud is heard.*) Adela! Adela!

**LA PONCIA:** (*At the door.*) Open up!

**BERNARDA:** Open up now. Don't think this house can hide your shame.

**SERVANT:** (*Entering*) You've woken the neighbours.

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**BERNARDA:** (*In a low harsh voice*) Open the door, before I break it down!  
(*Pause. Total silence.*) Adela! (*She moves away from the door.*) Bring an axe! (*La Poncia pushes open the door and goes inside. She utters a scream and reappears.*)  
What is it?

**LA PONCIA:** (*Clasping her hands to her throat*) Pray God none of us may end like that!

(*The sisters shrink back. The servant crosses herself. Bernarda gives a cry and steps forward.*)

**LA PONCIA:** Don't go in!

**BERNARDA:** No. No, I shall not! Pepe: you may have fled for your life now through the dark branches, but one day you'll be brought low. Cut her down! My daughter died a virgin! Carry her to her room and dress her as a maiden. No one will dare say a word! She died a virgin! Tell them to ring the bells twice at dawn.

**MARTIRIO:** She was a thousand times fortunate: to have had him.

**BERNARDA:** And no tears. Death must be stared straight in the face. Silence! (*To another daughter*) Silence, I say! (*To another*) You can shed tears when you're alone. We'll drown ourselves in a sea of mourning! She, the youngest of Bernarda Alba's daughters died a virgin. Do you hear? Silence, Silence I say! Silence!

*Curtain*

*Friday the 19th of June, 1936.*



DOÑA ROSITA THE SPINSTER AND THE  
LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS  
(*DOÑA ROSITA LA SOLTERA O EL  
LENGUAJE DE LAS FLORES*)

*A Granadine poem of the 19th Century,  
divided into several gardens with scenes of song and dance - 1935*



*'The Botanical Garden near Port Orotava, Tenerife'  
Alfred Diston, active 1818-1829  
The Yale Centre for British Art*

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## CAST LIST

Doña Rosita  
The Nurse/Housekeeper  
The Aunt  
First Girl/Coquette  
Second Girl/Coquette  
Third Girl/Coquette  
First Spinster  
Second Spinster  
Third Spinster  
The Spinsters' Mother  
First Ayola daughter  
Second Ayola daughter  
The Uncle  
The Nephew  
The Professor of Economics/Señor X  
Don Martín  
A Boy  
Two Working Men  
A Voice



## ACT I



*(A room with an exit to a conservatory)*

**UNCLE:** And my seeds?

**NURSE:** They were there.

**UNCLE:** Well, they're not now.

**AUNT:** Hellebores, fuchsias, and chrysanthemums, violet-coloured Louis  
Passy roses and silver-white Altairs with streaks of heliotrope.

**UNCLE:** You should be careful with flowers.

**NURSE:** If you mean me...

**AUNT:** Hush. Don't answer back.

**UNCLE:** I mean all of you. I found dahlia seeds trampled into the soil. (*He goes into the conservatory.*) You don't appreciate my conservatory enough; since the eighteenth century, when the Countess de Vandes grew the first musk rose, no one in Granada has managed it except me, not even the botanist at the University. You must have more respect for my plants.

**NURSE:** Well, don't I respect them?

**AUNT:** Ha! You're the worst.

**NURSE:** Yes, Señora. But I say drench the flowers like that and sprinkle water everywhere and we'll soon have toads in the sofa.

**AUNT:** Well you like the scent of flowers.

**NURSE:** No, Señora. To me flowers smell of dead children, or a flock of nuns, or a church altar. Sad things. Give me an orange or a fine quince, and you can forget all the roses in the world. But here...it's roses to the right, basil to the left, anemones, salvias, petunias and those flowers of today, the fashionable ones, chrysanthemums, ruffled like the hair of gipsy girls. How I'd love to see a pear-tree planted in this garden, or a cherry, or a persimmon!

**AUNT:** So you could eat them!

**NURSE:** Since I've a mouth...As they sang in my village;  
The mouth is there for eating,  
the feet are there for dancing,  
and a woman has something...

(*She stops goes, over to the Aunt, and whispers to her.*)

**AUNT:** Jesus! (*Crossing herself*)

**NURSE:** It's village vulgarity. (*Crossing herself*)

**ROSITA:** (*Entering rapidly. She is in red: her dress is nineteenth century, with mutton sleeves and trimmed with ribbons.*) And my hat? Where's my hat? San Luis' bells have already chimed thirty!

**NURSE:** I left it on the table.

**ROSITA:** Well it's not there. (*Looking for it*)

(*The Nurse exits.*)

**AUNT:** Have you tried the cupboard?

(*The Aunt exits.*)

**NURSE:** (*Entering*) I can't find it.

**ROSITA:** Can it be possible that no one knows where my hat is?

**NURSE:** Wear the blue one with daisies.

**ROSITA:** You're crazy.

**NURSE:** Not as crazy as you.

**AUNT:** (*Returning with it*) Here it is, be off with you!

(*Rosita takes it and runs out.*)

**NURSE:** Everything has to be done on the wing. Today wants now what will happen tomorrow. It takes flight, and slips through our hands. When a little girl has to count the days she begins when she's already old: 'My Rosita is eighty now'...it's always so. How often has she sat down to watch you do tatting or frivolité, or point de feston, or draw threads to adorn a dressing gown.

**AUNT:** Never.

**NURSE:** Always *in and out, and out and in; in and out, and out and in.*

**AUNT:** Mind what you're saying!

**NURSE:** Whatever it means, it's nothing new.

**AUNT:** Of course I've never liked to oppose her. How can one hurt an orphaned creature?

**NURSE:** *Neither father nor mother, nor dog to defend her,* but she has an uncle and aunt who are treasures. *(She embraces her.)*

**UNCLE:** *(Within)* Now this is the end!

**AUNT:** Holy mother of God!

**UNCLE:** It's fine that they crush my seeds underfoot, but it's intolerable that they tear the leaves from a rosebush I love so much: more than all the other roses, the musk or the hispid or the pompon or the damascene or the eglantine or the Queen Isabel. *(To the Aunt)* Come, come and see.

**AUNT:** It's broken?

**UNCLE:** No, no the worst hasn't happened, but it might have.

**AUNT:** We'll get to the bottom of this!

**UNCLE:** I wonder who knocked its pot over?

**NURSE:** Don't you stare at me.

**UNCLE:** Was it me, then?

**NURSE:** Why not a cat, or a dog, or a gust of wind through the window?

**AUNT:** Go, and sweep the conservatory.

**NURSE:** In this house it's clear no one's allowed to speak.

**UNCLE:** (*Entering*) It's a rose no one has seen before; a surprise I've prepared for you. Because it's unbelievable this '*rosa declinata*' with drooping buds, and defenceless because it lacks thorns; What a marvel, eh? Not one thorn! Because there's the *myrtifolia* that comes from Belgium and the *sulphurata* that shines in the dark. But this surpasses them all in rarity. The botanists call it '*rosa mutabile*', which means mutable, changeable...There's a description and a picture in this book, look! (*He opens the book.*) Red in the morning, it whitens in the afternoon, and fades at nightfall.

When it opens in the morning,  
It glows as red as blood.  
The dew won't touch it  
Afraid of being burnt.  
Open wide at noon  
It's hard as the coral.  
The sun leans through windows  
To gaze at its gleaming.  
When the birds begin  
To sing in the branches  
And the afternoon faints  
In violet light, off the sea,  
It turns white, as white  
As a grain of white salt.  
And when night chimes  
Its white horn of metal  
And the stars all appear  
As the breezes die,  
In a ray of darkness  
It starts to fade.

**AUNT:** And has it flowered yet?

**UNCLE:** One flower has opened.

**AUNT:** And it only lasts a day?

**UNCLE:** Just one. But I think I'll spend the day beside it to watch how it whitens.

**ROSITA:** (*Entering*) My parasol.

**UNCLE:** Your parasol.

**AUNT:** (*Loudly*) The Parasol!

**NURSE:** (*Appearing*) Here's the parasol!

(*Rosita takes the parasol and kisses her uncle and aunt.*)

**ROSITA:** How do I look?

**UNCLE:** Beautiful.

**AUNT:** There's not another like you.

**ROSITA:** (*Opening the parasol*) And now?

**NURSE:** For the love of God, close that parasol, you mustn't open one indoors. It brings bad luck!  
By Saint Bartholomew's wheel  
And Saint Joseph's staff  
And the sacred laurel bough,  
Darkness, get thee  
To Jerusalem's four corners.

(*The others laugh. The uncle exits.*)

**ROSITA:** (*Closing it*) It's closed.

**NURSE:** Don't do that again! Holy...saints!

**ROSITA:** Oops!

**AUNT:** What were you going to say?

**NURSE:** But I didn't say it.

**ROSITA:** (*Leaving, with a smile.*) See you later!

**AUNT:** Who's going with you?

**ROSITA:** (*Bowing her head*) I'll be with the girls. (*She exits.*)

**NURSE:** And the boyfriend.

**AUNT:** The boyfriend I believe I had to accept.

**NURSE:** I don't know which I like better, whether it's the boyfriend or her. (*The Aunt sits down to her lace-making.*) A pair of cousins to be put on a shelf of sugar, and if they die, God help them, be embalmed, and set in a niche with crystal and snow. Which do you prefer? (*She begins sweeping up.*)

**AUNT:** I love them both, as nephew and niece.

**NURSE:** One for the top sheet and one for the bottom, but...

**AUNT:** Rosita grew up here with me...

**NURSE:** Of course. As if I didn't believe in family. With me it's law. Blood runs in our veins, but unseen. She loves a second cousin she sees every day more than a brother far away. For what, we'll see.

**AUNT:** Woman, get on with the cleaning.

**NURSE:** I see it now. Here you're not allowed to open your mouth. You nurse a lovely girl like that. You abandon your own children, in a shack, quivering with hunger.

**AUNT:** It's 'quivering with cold'.

**NURSE:** Quivering with everything, so they can say to you: 'Be silent!' And since I'm a servant I can do no more than be silent, so that's what I do, and I can't answer and say...

**AUNT:** And say what..?

**NURSE:** Oh...leave that bobbin alone with its clicking; you're making my head burst with your clicking.

**AUNT:** (*Laughing*) Go, and see who's there.

*(There is a silence on stage, in which we hear the sound of the bobbin with which the Aunt is lace-making.)*

**VOICE:** (*A street-vendor's call*) Camomile...from the mountains!

**AUNT:** (*Speaking to herself*) One must buy camomile sometimes. On some occasions it's needed...Another day goes by... (*counting the points in her lace*) thirty-seven, thirty-eight.

**VOICE:** (*Further off*) Camomile...from the mountains!

**AUNT:** (*Taking a pin*) And...forty.

**NEPHEW:** (*Entering*) Aunt.

**AUNT:** (*Without looking at him*) Hello, have a seat if you want. Rosita has gone out already.

**NEPHEW:** Who is she with?

**AUNT:** With the girls. (*A pause. She looks at the Nephew.*) Something's happened.

**NEPHEW:** Yes.

**AUNT:** (*Anxiously*) I can almost guess. I hope I'm wrong.

**NEPHEW:** No. Read this.

**AUNT:** (*Reading*) Well: it's natural. That's why I opposed your relationship with Rosita. I knew that sooner or later you would have to join your parents. And how close it is! Forty days travel to reach Argentina, to reach Tucumán. If I were a man and younger, I'd slap your face.

**NEPHEW:** It's no sin to love my cousin. Do you imagine that I want to leave? Precisely when I want to stay, this arrives.

**AUNT:** Stay? Stay? You have to go. There are acres of land, and your father is old. I'm here to insist you make the voyage. But you'll leave me a life of bitterness. I don't want to think about your cousin. You're about to fire an arrow with purple ribbons into her heart. Now she'll find that cloth doesn't only serve to make flowers, but to soak up tears too.

**NEPHEW:** What do you advise me to do?

**AUNT:** You must go. Remember your father is my brother. Here you are no more than a stroller among gardens, while there you will be a farmer.

**NEPHEW:** But I would prefer...

**AUNT:** To marry? Are you mad? When your future's already laid out? And take Rosita with you, no doubt? Over our dead bodies, your uncle's and mine.

**NEPHEW:** That's just words. I know only too well I can't. But I want Rosita to wait for me. I'll soon be back.

**AUNT:** If you don't hit it off with a girl from Tucumán first. The words stuck to the roof of my mouth before I consented to your friendship with her; because my little girl will be left alone behind these four walls, while you'll be free to travel the seas, the rivers, the groves of grapefruit trees: my little one will be here, her every day like another, and you'll be there with horse and a gun shooting pheasants.

**NEPHEW:** You've no reason to speak to me in this way. I gave my word and I'll keep it. My father is in America keeping his word, and you know...

**AUNT:** (*Gently*) Hush.

**NEPHEW:** I have hushed. But don't take my respect as a sign of shame.

**AUNT:** (*With Andalusian irony*) Pardon me! I forgot: you're a man now.

**NURSE:** (*Entering weeping*) If he was a man he wouldn't be going.

**AUNT:** (*Forcefully*) Silence!

(*The Nurse weeps with great sobs.*)

**NEPHEW:** I'll return again in an instant. You tell her.

**AUNT:** Don't mind her. The old have to suffer difficult times.

(*The Nephew leaves.*)

**NURSE:** Ah, what a tragedy for my little girl! A tragedy! A tragedy! Such are the men of today! I'll be gathering gold coins in the street based on his promise. Once again tears fill this house. Ay! Señora! (*Attacking him*) If only a sea-serpent would swallow him!

**AUNT:** For God's sake!

**NURSE:** By the sesame plant  
By the three holy questions  
And the cinnamon flower,  
May your nights be evil  
And your sowing be evil.  
By the well of Saint Nicholas  
May your salt turn to poison.

*(She picks up a jug of water, and makes a cross in the salt)*

**AUNT:** No curses. Go about your business.

*(The Nurse leaves. They hear laughter. The Aunt exits.)*

**FIRST GIRL/COQUETTE:** *(Entering, and closing her parasol)* Ay!

**SECOND GIRL:** *(Ditto)* Ay! It's chilly!

**THIRD GIRL:** *(Ditto)* Ay!

**ROSITA:** *(Ditto)* My three pretty girls  
Whom do you sigh for?

**FIRST GIRL:** For no one.

**SECOND GIRL:** For the breeze.

**THIRD GIRL:** For a lover, to court me.

**ROSITA:** What then will bring  
A cry to your lips?

**FIRST GIRL:** The wall.

**SECOND GIRL:** A true portrait.

**THIRD GIRL:** The lace of my bedspread.

**ROSITA:** I long to sigh too,  
My friends! My beauties!

**FIRST GIRL:** Who'll receive it?

**ROSITA:** Two eyes  
That the shadows whiten,  
With lashes like vines,  
Where the dawn's sleeping.  
And, though dark they're  
Afternoons of poppies.

**FIRST GIRL:** A ribbon for that sigh!

**SECOND GIRL:** Ay!

**THIRD GIRL:** Happy girl!

**FIRST GIRL:** Happy!

**ROSITA:** If I'm not mistaken, then I've  
Heard certain things about you.

**FIRST GIRL:** Rumours are wild plants.

**SECOND GIRL:** The murmur of the waves.

**ROSITA:** I'm going to tell...

**FIRST GIRL:** Here goes!

**THIRD GIRL:** Rumours are garlands.

**ROSITA:** Granada, Calle de Elvira,  
That's where the girls live,  
Who go to the Alhambra,  
Three or four alone.

One dressed in green,  
One in mauve, the other  
In a Scottish corselet –  
With ribbons at their tails.  
Those in front are, herons;  
The one behind's a pigeon;  
Open to the poplars  
Mysterious the muslins.  
How dark the Alhambra!  
Where will the girls go  
While suffering the shadow  
The fountain and the rose?  
What lovers do they hope for?  
What myrtles will hide them?  
What hands steal the perfume  
From their swelling breasts?  
No one's with them, no one;  
Two herons and a pigeon.  
Yet the world has lovers  
Hidden in the bushes.  
The Cathedral still scatters  
Bronze taken by the breeze.  
The Genil lulls its oxen:  
Its butterflies, the Darro.  
The night comes charged  
With its hills of shadow;  
One shows off her shoes  
Beneath silk lace flounces;  
The eldest's eyes are open  
The youngest's narrowed.  
Whose will these three be  
High-breasted long-tails?  
To whom are they waving?  
Now, where are they going?  
Granada, Calle de Elvira,  
That's where the girls live,  
Who go to the Alhambra,  
Three or four alone.

**FIRST GIRL:** May the waves of rumour  
Spread through Granada.

**SECOND GIRL:** Do we have lovers?

**ROSITA:** Not one.

**SECOND GIRL:** Is that the truth?

**ROSITA:** Yes, indeed.

**THIRD GIRL:** Laces of frost adorn  
Our bridal nightgowns.

**ROSITA:** But...

**FIRST GIRL:** The night delights us.

**ROSITA:** But...

**SECOND GIRL:** In streets full of shadow.

**FIRST GIRL:** We climb to the Alhambra,  
Three or four alone.

**THIRD GIRL:** Ay!

**SECOND GIRL:** Hush!

**THIRD GIRL:** Why?

Ay!

**FIRST GIRL:** Ay, let no one hear her!

**ROSITA:** Alhambra, jasmine of sadness  
Where the moonlight rests.

**NURSE:** Child, your Aunt is calling you. (*Very sadly.*)

**ROSITA:** Have you been crying?

**NURSE:** (*Controlling herself*) No...it's just something, something I...

**ROSITA:** I'm not afraid. What's happened? (*She goes in swiftly, gazing at the Nurse. When Rosita has gone, the Nurse breaks into silent weeping.*)

**FIRST GIRL:** (*In a loud voice*) What's going on?

**SECOND GIRL:** You tell us.

**NURSE:** Be quiet.

**THIRD GIRL:** (*In a whisper*) Is it bad news?

(*The Nurse goes to the door and looks towards the point of Rosita's exit.*)

**NURSE:** She's telling her now!

(*Pause, while they all listen.*)

**FIRST GIRL:** Rosita is crying, let's go inside.

**NURSE:** Come back, and you'll hear. Go! You can leave through the gate.  
(*They leave.*)

(*The stage is left empty. A piano faintly plays a study by Czerny. A Pause. The cousin enters and on arrival halts centre stage as Rosita enters. The two remain gazing at each other. The cousin advances. He takes her by the waist. She leans her head on his shoulder.*)

**ROSITA:** Why are your treacherous eyes  
Intertwined with mine?  
Why do your hands weave  
Flowers above my head.

To what grief of nightingales  
Do you condemn my youth,  
For since my life and aim's  
Your figure and your presence,  
You'll shatter with cruel absence  
The strings of my lute!

**COUSIN:** Oh, my cousin, my treasure,  
Nightingale on the mountain,  
Cease your singing of  
Imaginary cold;  
There's no ice in my going,  
For, though I cross the sea,  
The waters must lend me  
Nard of spume and calm  
To contain the fire in me,  
For I'm about to burn.

**ROSITA:** One night, half-slumbering,  
On my balcony of jasmine,  
I saw two cherubs plunging  
Towards an amorous rose;  
Being white in colour  
It flushed incarnadine;  
But, like a tender flower,  
Its petals, all reddened,  
Fell from it wounded  
By the kiss of love.  
So I, the innocent cousin,  
In my garden of myrtle,  
Gave my longings to the air,  
My whiteness to the fountain.  
Sweet, thoughtless gazelle  
I raised my eyes, I saw you  
And in my heart I felt  
Sharp needles inside me  
That are like open wounds  
Crimson as wallflowers.

**COUSIN:** I shall return, my cousin,  
To take you to my side  
In a boat filled with gold  
And with sails of happiness;  
Light and shadow, day and night,  
Thinking only of love for you.

**ROSITA:** But the poison love distils  
In the isolated spirit,  
Will weave with earth and water  
A shroud for me when I'm dead.

**COUSIN:** When my tardy stallion eats  
The stems bowed with dew,  
When the mist from the river  
Veils the rampart of the wind,  
When the violence of summer  
Paints me nature's crimson  
And the frost leaves in me  
Pinpricks of the morning star,  
I'll say, for I love you,  
That I would die for you.

**ROSITA:** Anxiously, I see you coming  
One afternoon to my Granada  
And all the light brine-filled  
With nostalgia for the sea;  
A yellow conjoined,  
A jasmine bleeding,  
Since the tangle of stones  
Will impede your journey,  
And a swirl of nard  
Maddening the rooftops.  
You'll return?

**COUSIN:** Yes, I'll return!

**ROSITA:** What bright dove will declare  
You're here, what annunciation?

**COUSIN:** The bright dove of my faith will.

**ROSITA:** See how I'll embroider  
Sheets for us, for us two.

**COUSIN:** By the diamonds of God,  
The carnation in His side,  
I swear I'll come to you.

**ROSITA:** Farewell, Cousin!

**COUSIN:** So, farewell!

*(They embrace facing each other. A distant piano is heard. The Cousin leaves. Rosita is weeping. The Uncle appears, who crosses the stage towards the conservatory. Seeing her Uncle, Rosita takes up the book of roses which is in reach of her hand.)*

**UNCLE:** What were you doing?

**ROSITA:** Nothing.

**UNCLE:** You were reading?

**ROSITA:** Yes.

*(The Uncle exits. Rosita reads.)*

When it opens in the morning,  
It glows as red as blood.  
The dew won't touch it  
Afraid of being burnt.  
Open wide at noon  
It's hard as the coral.  
The sun leans through windows

To gaze at its gleaming.  
When the birds begin  
To sing in the branches  
And the afternoon faints  
In violet light, off the sea,  
It turns white, as white  
As a grain of white salt.  
And when night chimes  
Its white horn of metal  
And the stars all appear  
As the breezes die,  
In the ray of darkness  
It starts to fade.

*Curtain*

## ACT II



*(Fifteen years later. The sitting room in Dona Rosita's house. In the background, the garden.)*

**SEÑOR X:** Well, I will always be one with the century.

**UNCLE:** The century that has just begun will be a materialist century.

**SEÑOR X:** But much more advanced than the last one. My friend, Señor Longoria of Madrid, has just bought a car in which one can travel at the amazing speed of thirty kilometres an hour; and the Shah of Persia, who is indeed a very pleasant person, has also bought a twenty-four horse power Panhard Levassor.

**UNCLE:** And I say: where are they going so fast? See what happened in the Paris-Madrid race which had to be abandoned, because before reaching Bordeaux all the drivers had been killed.

**SEÑOR X:** Count Louis Zborowski, who died by accident, and Marcel Renault, or Renol, either form can be used or spoken, who also died by

accident, were martyrs for science, who will be worshipped at the altars on the day when the Positivist religion arises. I knew Renault quite well. Poor Marcell!

**UNCLE:** You won't convince me. (*He sits down.*)

**SEÑOR X:** (*With his foot resting on a chair and playing with his walking stick.*) Clearly; though a Professor of Political Economics shouldn't be discussing such questions with a grower of roses. Yet nowadays, believe me, there's no lack of quietist or *obscurantist* ideas. Nowadays the path is open to a Jean Baptiste Say, or See, either form can be used or spoken, or a Count Leo Tolstoy, Lev in Russian, as daring in form as he is profound in content. I am a citizen of Athens; I am not an adherent of passive Nature, of *Natura Naturata*.

**UNCLE:** Everyone lives as best he knows or can, in this everyday world.

**SEÑOR X:** That's understood, Earth is a mediocre planet, but we must nurture civilisation. If Santos Dumont, instead of studying comparative Meteorology, had dedicated himself to cultivating roses, the dirigible balloon would still be in Brahma's breast.

**UNCLE:** (*Disgustedly*) Botany is also a science.

**SEÑOR X:** (*Disparagingly*) Yes, when it is applied: by studying the juices of fragrant *Anthemis*, or the giant *Pulsatilla*, or the narcotic effects of *Datura Stramonium*.

**UNCLE:** (*Innocently*) Are you interested in those plants?

**SEÑOR X:** I have an insufficient volume of experience regarding them. Their horticulture interests me, which is quite different. *Voilà!* (*Pause.*) And... Rosita?

**UNCLE:** Rosita? (*Pause. In a loud voice.*) Rosita!...

**A VOICE:** (*From within*) She's not here.

**UNCLE:** She's not here.

**SEÑOR X:** I regret it.

**UNCLE:** I too. Since it's her Saint's Day, she has to go and say her forty Credos.

**SEÑOR X:** For the occasion I have brought you this *pendentive*. It's an Eiffel Tower in mother-of-pearl with above it two doves holding in their claws the Wheel of Industry.

**UNCLE:** It's much appreciated.

**SEÑOR X:** I was all for buying a little cavern in silver through whose entrance the Virgin of Lourdes, or Lordes, can be seen, or a buckle for a belt adorned with a snake and four dragonflies, but I preferred the first as being more to my taste.

**UNCLE:** Thank you.

**SEÑOR X:** I'm enchanted by its favourable reception.

**UNCLE:** Thank you

**SEÑOR X:** My best wishes to your wife.

**UNCLE:** Thank you.

**SEÑOR X:** And my regards to her charming little niece, to whom I wish all happiness in celebrating her name-day.

**UNCLE:** A thousand thanks.

**SEÑOR X:** Regard me as your faithful servant.

**UNCLE:** A thousand thanks.

**SEÑOR X:** I shall repeat it...

**UNCLE:** Thank you, thank you, thank you.

**SEÑOR X:** Forever. (*He exits.*)

**UNCLE:** (*Loudly*) Thank you, thank you, thank you.

**NURSE:** (*Enters, laughing*) I don't know how you have the patience. Between that gentleman, and the other, Don Confucio Montes de Oca, baptised in Masonic Lodge 43, they'll set the house on fire someday.

**UNCLE:** I've told you I don't like you eavesdropping on my conversations.

**NURSE:** That's called being ungrateful. I was behind the door, certainly, but I wasn't there to listen, but to pick up a broom since the gentleman was leaving.

**AUNT:** (*Entering*) Has he gone yet?

**UNCLE:** He has.

**NURSE:** Is he still a possibility for Rosalita?

**AUNT:** Why speak of possibilities? You know nothing of Rosita!

**NURSE:** But I know about possibilities.

**AUNT:** My niece is engaged.

**NURSE:** Mustn't speak, mustn't speak, mustn't speak, mustn't speak!

**AUNT:** Then be quiet.

**NURSE:** Does it seem right to you for a man to go off and leave a woman stranded for fifteen years, one who is the cream on the milk? She ought to be married. It grieves my heart caring for her table linen in Marseilles

lace, and her sets of bedding decorated with gimp, and table runners and bedcovers of gauze with flowers in relief. They ought to be used and worn, but she pays no attention to how time passes. She'll have silver hair and she'll still be sewing satin ribbon on the border of her nightdress.

**AUNT:** Why involve yourself in something that has nothing to do with you?

**NURSE:** (*With amazement*) But I don't *involve* myself, I'm already involved.

**AUNT:** I'm sure she's happy.

**NURSE:** It's a pretence. Yesterday I had to spend all day with her hanging around the entrance to the Circus because she insisted that one of the acrobats looked like her cousin.

**AUNT:** And did he really look like him?

**NURSE:** He was as handsome as a novice about to sing his first mass, but of course she would prefer the nephew to have that figure, that white neck and that moustache. He looked nothing like him. In your family the men are not handsome.

**AUNT:** Well, thank you!

**NURSE:** They are all short with sloping shoulders.

**AUNT:** Off with you!

**NURSE:** It's the truth. All it was, Rosita liked the acrobat as I liked him or you would. But she ascribes everything to the other. Sometimes I'd like to give her a thump on the head. Because she'll get cow's eyes gazing at the sky so much.

**AUNT:** Fine; and the point of this. It's acceptable to speak plainly, but not to be coarse.

**NURSE:** I don't speak out to anyone unless I love them.

**AUNT:** It sometimes seems otherwise to me.

**NURSE:** I'd give her the bread from my mouth and blood from my veins, if she asked it of me.

**AUNT:** (*Angrily*) A tongue full of idle promises! Mere words!

**NURSE:** (*Angrily*) And deeds! I have proved it, and deeds! I love her more than you.

**AUNT:** That's a lie.

**NURSE:** (*Angrily*) No it's the truth!

**AUNT:** Don't raise your voice to me!

**NURSE:** (*Loudly*) Because it sounds out like a bell.

**AUNT:** Be quiet, you ignoramus!

**NURSE:** Forty years I've been with you.

**AUNT:** (*Almost weeping*) Well you're dismissed!

**NURSE:** (*Shouting*) Thank God, I'll be out of your sight!

**AUNT:** (*Weeping*) Off to the street with you!

**NURSE:** (*Breaking into tears*) To the street! (*She heads towards the door weeping and in departing knocks something over. Both of them are weeping.*)

(*Pause.*)

**AUNT:** (*Wiping away her tears, speaking softly*) What have you knocked over?

**NURSE:** A barometer, in the Louis XV style.

**AUNT:** Really?

**NURSE:** (*Weeping*) Yes, Señora.

**AUNT:** Can I see?

**NURSE:** It's for Rosita's name day. (*She approaches.*)

**AUNT:** (*Looking at it.*) It's a beauty.

**NURSE:** (*In a tearful voice*) Set in velvet, it's a fountain with real snails; over the fountain a bower of wire with green roses; the water in the bowl is a cluster of blue sequins, and the jet is the thermometer itself. The pools around it are painted in oils and a nightingale is drinking from them, embroidered in gold thread. I wanted one where you pulled a cord and it sang, but it wasn't possible.

**AUNT:** It's not possible.

**NURSE:** But it doesn't need to sing. We've real ones in the garden.

**AUNT:** That's true. (*Pause.*) Why have you done this?

**NURSE:** (*Weeping*) I would give Rosita everything I have.

**AUNT:** It's because you love her like no one else!

**NURSE:** Second only to you.

**AUNT:** No. You nursed her at your breast.

**NURSE:** You have given your life to her.

**AUNT:** But I did it out of duty, you out of generosity.

**NURSE:** (*More strongly*) Don't say that!

**AUNT:** You have shown that you love her more than anyone else.

**NURSE:** I have done what anyone would in my position. I'm a servant. You pay me and I serve.

**AUNT:** You've always been considered one of the family.

**NURSE:** A humble servant who gives what she has, that's all.

**AUNT:** Are you telling me that is all you are?

**NURSE:** Am I anything more?

**AUNT:** (*Annoyed*) You shouldn't say such things to me. I won't listen.

**NURSE:** (*Annoyed*) Nor I. (*They exit rapidly, one by each door*)

(*As she leaves the Aunt encounters the Uncle.*)

**UNCLE:** From being pressed together so long, bits of lace become thorns.

**AUNT:** She is forever parading hers.

**UNCLE:** Don't tell me again, I know it all off by heart...still, we can't do without her. Yesterday I heard you explaining all the details of our bank account with her. You don't know how to maintain your position. It doesn't seem to me to be the most suitable of conversations to have with a servant.

**AUNT:** She is not a servant.

**UNCLE:** (*Gently*) Enough, enough: I don't wish to start an argument.

**AUNT:** But can't you discuss it with me?

**UNCLE:** I can, but I prefer to stay silent.

**AUNT:** Though you insist on words of reproach.

**UNCLE:** Why should I say anything about it after all this time? To avoid argument I make my bed, wash my shirts with a bar of soap, and shake out the rugs in my room.

**AUNT:** It's not right to give yourself the airs of a superior man who is badly served, when everything in this house is subject to your comfort and wishes.

**UNCLE:** (*Gently*) On the contrary, my dear.

**AUNT:** (*Seriously*) Not at all. Instead of making lace, I prune your plants. What do you do for me?

**UNCLE:** Pardon me. The time comes when people who have lived together for many years display irritation and anxiety over the tiniest things, to add intensity and passion to something long dead. We've been having these conversations for twenty years.

**AUNT:** No, for twenty years we've been breaking windows...

**UNCLE:** And we haven't minded the draught.

*(Rosita appears. She is dressed in pink. The fashion has altered from the mutton sleeves of 1900. Her skirt is bell-shaped. She crosses the stage, quickly, with scissors in hand. At centre-stage she halts.)*

**ROSITA:** Has the postman been?

**UNCLE:** Has he?

**AUNT:** I don't know. (*Aloud*) Has the postman been? (*Pause*) No, not yet.

**ROSITA:** He always goes by at this time.

**UNCLE:** He ought to be here shortly.

**AUNT:** He's often delayed.

**ROSITA:** The other day I found him playing games with the children and he'd left a pile of letters on the ground.

**AUNT:** He'll be here soon.

**ROSITA:** Call me. (*She exits rapidly.*)

**UNCLE:** Where are you going with those scissors?

**ROSITA:** To cut some roses.

**UNCLE:** (*Astounded*) What? And who has given you permission?

**AUNT:** I have. It's her name day.

**ROSITA:** I want to put some in the jardinière and in the vase in the hall.

**UNCLE:** Every time I cut a rose it's as if I were cutting off a finger. I feel it the same way. (*Gazing at his wife.*) I won't argue. I know they don't last. (*The Nurse enters.*) Thus they speak of the waltz of the roses, which is one of the more beautiful compositions of these times, but I can't conceal the disgust it arouses in me to see them in their vases. (*He exits the stage.*)

**ROSITA:** (*To the Nurse*) Has the post come?

**NURSE:** Well, the only thing roses are good for is to adorn rooms.

**ROSITA:** (*Annoyed*) I asked if the mail has come.

**NURSE:** (*Annoyed*) Would I keep the letters to myself if they had come?

**AUNT:** Go, and cut the flowers.

**ROSITA:** There's a bitter taste to everything in this house.

**NURSE:** We come across pesticides in every corner.

**AUNT:** Are you content?

**ROSITA:** I don't know.

**AUNT:** Why is that?

**ROSITA:** When I don't see people I'm content, but when I have to...

**AUNT:** Of course! I don't like the life you lead. Your fiancé doesn't demand you be unsociable. He always says in his letters you should go about.

**ROSITA:** It's just that on the streets I notice how time has passed and I don't want to abandon my dreams. They have built another house in the little square. I don't want to notice how time is passing.

**AUNT:** Of course! I've often advised you to write to your fiancé and wed someone else here. You will be happier. I know there are men young and old who are fond of you.

**ROSITA:** But Aunt! My feelings are so profound, so deep-rooted. If I don't see people I can believe another week has gone by. I can hope, just as I did at first. What is a year or two, or five? (*A bell rings.*) The post.

**AUNT:** What might it bring you?

**NURSE:** (*Entering*) Here are those wretched spinsters.

**AUNT:** Mary and Jesus!

**ROSITA:** What's the matter?

**NURSE:** That mother and her three daughters. All show on the outside and straw for brains. They need a good kick in the...! (*She exits.*)

*(The three spinster daughters and their mother enter. The three Spinsters are wearing huge hats with straggling feathers, and exaggerated costumes, gloves to the elbow with bracelets round them, and fans hanging from long chains. The Mother is dressed in brownish black with a hat with old purple ribbons.)*

**MOTHER:** Congratulations. *(She kisses them.)*

**ROSITA:** Thank you. *(She kisses the daughters, and addresses them by their names.)*  
Love! Charity! Mercy!

**FIRST SPINSTER:** Congratulations.

**SECOND SPINSTER:** Congratulations.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Congratulations.

**AUNT:** *(To the Mother)* How are your feet?

**MOTHER:** Worse all the time. If it were not for these girls, I'd be housebound. *(They sit down.)*

**AUNT:** Have you tried rubbing them with lavender?

**FIRST SPINSTER:** Every night.

**SECOND SPINSTER:** And a decoction of mallows.

**AUNT:** No rheumatism can resist it.

*(Pause)*

**MOTHER:** And your husband?

**AUNT:** He's well, thank you.

*(Pause)*

**MOTHER:** And his roses?

**AUNT:** And his roses.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** How pretty the flowers are!

**SECOND SPINSTER:** We have a Saint Francis rose in a pot.

**ROSITA:** Do Saint Francis roses have any scent?

**FIRST SPINSTER:** Very little.

**MOTHER:** What I like most is mock orange.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Violets are very beautiful.

*(Pause)*

**MOTHER:** Daughters, have you brought the card?

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Yes. It's a girl dressed in pink, and is at the same time a hygrometer. You can see the friar's hood that shows the humidity. Depending on how humid it is the girl's skirts, which are of very thin paper, open or close.

**ROSITA:** *(Reading.)* One morning in the fields  
The nightingales were singing  
And the song they sang was:  
'Rosita is the sweetest.'

You shouldn't have gone to so much trouble.

**AUNT:** It's in very good taste.

**MOTHER:** I don't lack taste, I lack money.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** Mama...!

**SECOND SPINSTER:** Mama...!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Mama...!

**MOTHER:** Daughters, here I can speak confidentially. There is no one else listening. Indeed, you know that since my poor husband died it has truly required a miracle to live on the pension he left us. I still seem to hear the father of these children when, generous gentleman that he was, he said to me: 'Henrietta, spend, spend, I earn three hundred and fifty pesetas'; but those times are gone! In spite of everything we have not lost our status. What anguish I have experienced, Señora, so that these children could continue to buy hats! What tears, what trouble for a ribbon or a set of loops! Those feathers and net cost me many sleepless nights.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Mama...!

**MOTHER:** It's true, daughter. We cannot overspend by even the smallest amount. Many times I ask them: 'What do you prefer, children of my soul: eggs for breakfast or to rent chairs in the promenade?' And they reply with one voice: 'The chairs.'

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Mama, don't speak about that any more. All Granada knows.

**MOTHER:** Of course, who can say otherwise? And we get by with potatoes or a bunch of grapes, yet still with a Mongolian cloak or a striped parasol or a poplin blouse, and all the accessories. Because there is no alternative. But it costs me my life! And my eyes fill with tears when I see them taking turns with what they have.

**SECOND SPINSTER:** Do you still go to the Poplar Grove, Rosita?

**ROSITA:** No.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** There we always meet the Ponce de Léons, the Herrastis and the Baroness de Santa Matilde de la Bendición Papal. The best of Granada.

**MOTHER:** Of course! They were all at the College of Puerto de Cielo together.

*(Pause)*

**AUNT:** *(Rising)* Will you take something? *(They all rise)*

**MOTHER:** I don't have your gift for desserts like Piñonate or Pastel de Gloria.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** *(To Rosita)* Is there any news?

**ROSITA:** The last post promised some. We're waiting to read it.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Have you finished your set of Valenciennes lace?

**ROSITA:** Oh yes! I've done another in nainsook with butterflies by a pool.

**SECOND SPINSTER:** The day you marry you will have the best trousseau in the world.

**ROSITA:** Oh, I think it's all too little. They say men tire of you if they always see you in the same dress.

**NURSE:** *(Entering)* The daughters of Ayola the photographer are here.

**AUNT:** You mean the Ayola young ladies.

**NURSE:** Here are the noble daughters of the great Ayola, photographer to His Majesty and gold-medal winner at the Madrid Exhibition. *(She exits)*

**AUNT:** We have to put up with her; but at times she gets on my nerves. *(The Spinsters are looking at some cloth with Rosita.)* Servants are impossible.

**MOTHER:** Be brave with her. I have a woman who sweeps the floor in the evenings; I give her what I have always given her: one peseta a month and the leftovers and that is quite enough these days; then the other day she let us down saying that she wanted five, and I can't afford it!

**AUNT:** I don't know where it will all end.

*(The Ayola daughters enter, greeting Rosita cheerfully. They are dressed in the rich and exaggerated fashion of the epoch.)*

**ROSITA:** Do you know them?

**FIRST AYOLA:** Only by sight.

**ROSITA:** The Señoritas Ayola, the Señora and Señoritas Escarpini.

**SECOND AYOLA:** We have seen you before sitting on chairs in the Promenade. *(Feigning a smile)*

**ROSITA:** Take a seat. *(The Spinsters sit.)*

**AUNT:** *(To the Ayolas)* Would you like a sweetmeat?

**SECOND AYOLA:** No; we've eaten not long ago. Indeed I had four eggs with chopped tomato, and I could hardly rise from my chair.

**FIRST AYOLA:** *(Laughing)* How witty!

*(Pause. The Ayolas burst into uncontrollable laughter which communicates itself to Rosita, who makes efforts to contain it. The Spinsters and their Mother remain serious. Pause.)*

**AUNT:** What creatures!

**MOTHER:** Youth!

**AUNT:** It's a light-hearted time.

**ROSITA:** (*Walking round the stage, arranging things.*) Please, hush. (*They fall silent.*)

**AUNT:** (*To the Third Spinster*) And how is your piano going?

**THIRD SPINSTER:** I don't play much now. I have too much work to do.

**ROSITA:** I haven't heard you for ages.

**MOTHER:** If it were not for me their fingers would have lost their flexibility. But I always insist.

**SECOND SPINSTER:** Since poor Papa died I don't feel like it. He enjoyed it so!

**SECOND AYOLA:** I agree it often brought tears.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** When she played Popper's tarantella.

**SECOND SPINSTER:** And '*The Maiden's Prayer*'.

**MOTHER:** He was a man of great feeling!

(*The Ayola who has been stifling her laughter, laughs aloud. Rosita turning away from the Spinsters, also laughs, but controls it.*)

**AUNT:** These girls!

**FIRST AYOLA:** We laughed because, before we arrived here...

**SECOND AYOLA:** She stumbled and was about to ring the bell...

**FIRST AYOLA:** And I... (*They laugh*)

(*The Spinsters give a small feigned smile, a shade sad and bored.*)

**MOTHER:** We must go now!

**AUNT:** Not at all.

**ROSITA:** (*To them all*) Then let us celebrate the fact that you didn't fall!  
Nurse, bring the sweets, those '*Bones of Saint Catherine*'.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** How rich they are!

**MOTHER:** Last year we treated ourselves to a pound of them.

(*The Nurse enters with the sweets.*)

**NURSE:** Titbits for the gentry. (*To Rosita*) The postman is coming past the poplars.

**ROSITA:** Wait at the door for him!

**FIRST AYOLA:** I don't want one. I'd prefer anisette with selzer water.

**SECOND AYOLA:** And I grape juice.

**ROSITA:** Are you still drinking that!

**FIRST AYOLA:** When I was six years old I came here and Rosita's fiancé introduced me to it. Don't you remember, Rosita?

**ROSITA:** (*Seriously*) No!

**SECOND AYOLA:** For my part, Rosita and her fiancé taught me my ABC...How long ago it all was!

**AUNT:** Fifteen years!

**FIRST AYOLA:** I almost seem to forget your fiancé's face.

**SECOND AYOLA:** Didn't he have a scar on his lip?

**ROSITA:** A scar? Aunt, did he have a scar?

**AUNT:** Don't you remember, child? It was the one thing that made him a little ugly.

**ROSITA:** But it was not a scar; it was a burn, a little redness. Scars are deeper than that.

**FIRST AYOLA:** I wish Rosita would get married!

**ROSITA:** For goodness sake!

**SECOND AYOLA:** It's not foolish. I do too!

**ROSITA:** And why?

**FIRST AYOLA:** To go to a wedding. I'll marry as soon as I can.

**AUNT:** Child!

**FIRST AYOLA:** Whoever it is, I don't want to stay single.

**SECOND AYOLA:** I feel the same.

**AUNT:** (*To the Mother*) What do you think of that?

**FIRST AYOLA:** Oh! I'm Rosita's friend because she has a fiancé! Women without fiancés are of no account, poor things, and all of them... (*She glances towards the Spinsters*) Well, not all, no; some of them... Anyway, they are all crosspatches!

**AUNT:** Ah, now that's nice.

**MOTHER:** Stop it.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** There are many who don't marry because they don't wish to.

**SECOND AYOLA:** That's not me I think.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** (*Emphatically*) That's for sure.

**SECOND AYOLA:** Those who don't want to marry usually stop using powder and padding out their bosoms, and spending days and nights hanging over the balcony rail spying on people.

**SECOND SPINSTER:** They might just be taking the air!

**ROSITA:** (*With a forced laugh*) What a foolish conversation!

**AUNT:** Well, why not play for us a little?

**MOTHER:** Come on, daughter!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** (*Rising*) What should I play?

**SECOND AYOLA:** Play: '*Viva Frascuelo!*'

**SECOND SPINSTER:** That barcarolle '*The frigate Numancia*'.

**ROSITA:** Why not: '*What the Flowers Say*'

**MOTHER:** Ah, yes! '*What the Flowers Say!*' (To the Aunt) Have you heard that? Playing and singing together. It's beautiful!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** I can also recite: '*The dark swallows return to make their nests in the eaves.*'

**FIRST AYOLA:** That's too sad.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** Sad things can still be fine.

**AUNT:** Come along, come along!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** (*At piano*) Mother, take me to the country  
in the light of morning  
to see the flowers open

on their swaying stems.  
A thousand flowers are speaking  
to a thousand lovers,  
and the stream is murmuring  
now the nightingale has ceased.

**ROSITA:** The rose it had opened  
with the light of morning;  
so red with its hot blushes  
the dew had burnt away;  
so hot there on its stem that  
the breeze itself was burning;  
so high there! How it glowed!  
The rose that had opened!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** 'My eyes are yours alone'  
the heliotrope was saying.  
'I'll not love you while I live'  
said the flower of the basil.  
'I am shy' said the violet.  
'I am cold,' said the white rose.  
Said the jasmine: 'I am faithful';  
the carnation: 'I am passion!'

**SECOND SPINSTER:** The hyacinth is bitterness;  
grief, the passion-flower;

**FIRST SPINSTER:** Wall-rocket is disdain  
and hope the lily-bower.

**AUNT:** Says the spikenard: 'I am your friend';  
'I trust in you', the passion-flower.  
The honeysuckle rocks you,  
The immortelle will kill you.

**MOTHER:** Immortelle of funerals,  
flower of crossed hands;  
how fine when the breeze  
weeps on your garland!

**ROSITA:** The rose it had opened  
but afternoon followed  
and a sad breath of snow  
weighing down the branches;  
when the shadows lengthened  
and the nightingale chanted,  
as if sentenced to death  
it turned faint with whiteness;  
and when the night's vast  
horn of metal sounded  
and the winds entangled  
slumbered on the mountain,  
it faded, still sighing  
for the crystal of morning.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Beneath your long hair  
the cut flowers moan.  
Some carry little daggers;  
others fire or water.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** The flowers they speak  
the language of lovers.

**ROSITA:** Sweet acacia is jealous;  
disdainful, the dahlia;  
the spikenard sighs love;  
laughter, the Gala rose.  
The yellow one is hatred;  
The red one is anger;  
the white means marriage,  
and a purple one a shroud.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Mother, take me to the country  
in the light of morning  
to see the flowers open  
on their swaying stems.

*(The piano plays a last run and then finishes.)*

**AUNT:** Oh, that's beautiful!

**MOTHER:** There's also the language of fans, the language of gloves, the language of stamps and the language of hours. It gives me goose pimples when they say:  
Twelve o'clock strikes  
With fatal precision  
The hour of your death  
Acknowledge it, sinner.

**FIRST AYOLA:** *(Her mouth full of sweets)* How unpleasant!

**MOTHER:** And when they say :

At one we're born  
Tra-la, tra-la,  
And being born,  
Tra-la lira,  
Is like opening your eyes  
Tra-la, la  
In an orchard,  
Orchard, orchard.

**SECOND AYOLA:** *(To her sister)* I think she's a little tipsy. *(To her mother)* Do you want another glass?

**MOTHER:** With great pleasure and a strong will, as they said in my day.

*(Rosita is in a state of expectation waiting for the arrival of the postman.)*

**NURSE:** The post! (*A general commotion*)

**AUNT:** It has arrived at last!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** You have to consider the days it takes to get here.

**MOTHER:** That's hardly material!

**SECOND AYOLA:** Open the letter!

**FIRST AYOLA:** It's more discreet to read it alone, since it might say something risqué.

**MOTHER:** Good heavens!

(*Rosa goes out with the letter.*)

**FIRST AYOLA:** Well a letter from your fiancé isn't a sermon.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** It's a sermon on love.

**SECOND AYOLA:** Oh, how elegant! (*The Ayolas laugh*)

**FIRST AYOLA:** We know she's never received one.

**MOTHER:** (*Forcefully*) Fortunately for her!

**FIRST AYOLA:** Well, that's her view.

**AUNT:** (*To the Nurse, who is going to join Rosita*) Where are you going?

**NURSE:** Can't I move a step?

**AUNT:** Leave her alone!

**ROSITA:** (*Entering*) Aunt! Aunt!

**AUNT:** What is it, child?

**ROSITA:** (*Agitated*) Oh, Aunt!

**FIRST AYOLA:** What is it?

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Tell us!

**SECOND AYOLA:** What is it?

**NURSE:** Tell!

**AUNT:** Out with it!

**MOTHER:** Get her a glass of water!

**SECOND AYOLA:** Come on!

**FIRST AYOLA:** Quick. (*Uproar reigns*)

**ROSITA:** (*Her voice choking*) To marry... (*Quite terrified*) To marry me, because no more is possible right now, but...

**SECOND AYOLA:** (*Hugging her*) Hurray! What happiness!

**FIRST AYOLA:** Hug me!

**AUNT:** Stop speaking.

**ROSITA:** (*More calmly*) But since it's impossible for him to come now the marriage will be by proxy and he will come later.

**FIRST SPINSTER:** Congratulations!

**MOTHER:** (*Almost in tears*) God grant you the happiness you deserve! (*She hugs her.*)

**NURSE:** Fine; and this *proxy*, what is it?

**ROSITA:** Simple. A person represents the bridegroom at the wedding.

**NURSE:** And what else?

**ROSITA:** Then one is married!

**NURSE:** And the wedding night?

**ROSITA:** Good God!

**FIRST AYOLA:** Well said? And the wedding night?

**AUNT:** Girls!

**NURSE:** Let him come himself and marry her! *Proxy!* I've never heard of such a thing. The bed and its hangings shivering with cold and the bride's nightdress in the darkest trunk: Señora, don't let any *proxy* enter this house. (*They all laugh.*) Señora, I don't like this *proxy!*

**ROSITA:** But he will come soon. It is one more test of what I wish for!

**NURSE:** It is! Let him come then, and take your arm, and stir the sugar in your coffee, and test it first to see if it's too hot! (*Laughter*)

(*The Uncle appears with a rose.*)

**UNCLE:** I heard it all, and almost without realising it I cut that unique mutable rose I have in my conservatory. It is still red,

When it opens in the morning,  
It glows as red as blood.

**ROSITA:** The sun leans through windows  
To gaze at its gleaming.

**UNCLE:** If I had waited another two hours before cutting it my gift to you would have turned white.

**ROSITA:** White as a dove,  
As laughter of the sea;  
White as the cold white  
Of a heap of salt.

**UNCLE:** But now it still holds the warmth of youth.

**AUNT:** Drink a glass with me, my dear. This is a day on which you should.

*(Commotion. The third Spinster sits down to the piano and plays a polka. Rosita is gazing at the rose. The first and second Spinsters dance with the Ayolas and sing)*

Because I saw you girl  
down by the ocean  
your sweet languor  
filled me with sighs,  
and the subtle sweetness  
of that fatal illusion  
in the light of the moon  
saw you drown by and by.

*(The Aunt and Uncle dance. Rosita goes towards the second Spinster and one of the Ayolas. She dances with the Spinster. The other Ayola claps her hands towards the old people, and the Nurse in the doorway has the same idea.)*

*Curtain*

### ACT III



*(Ten years later. A ground floor room: its windows with green shutters looking onto the garden. The stage is silent. It is afternoon. A clock strikes six. The Nurse crosses the stage with a suitcase and a bundle. The Aunt appears and sits on a low chair centre stage. Silence. The clock again strikes six. Pause.)*

**NURSE:** *(Entering)* The clock's struck six for the second time.

**AUNT:** And Rosita?

**NURSE:** Upstairs in the tower room. And you, where have you been?

**AUNT:** Removing the last pots from the conservatory.

**NURSE:** I haven't seen her all morning.

**AUNT:** Since my husband died the house feels so empty it seems twice the size, and we have to go searching for one another. When I cough in my room some nights, I hear an echo as if I was in church.

**NURSE:** It's true the house has proved too large.

**AUNT:** (*Almost in tears*) And then...if he were alive, with that clear mind of his, with his ability...

**NURSE:** (*Singing*) Tra-la-tra-la-tra-la... No Señora, I won't let you cry. He's been dead six years and I don't want to see you as you were that day. How we cried! Be strong, Señora! Let the sun shine in the corners! Let us hope for many years of cutting roses!

**AUNT:** (*Rising*) I am an old woman. We are living amongst ruins.

**NURSE:** There's nothing wrong with us. I'm old too!

**AUNT:** If I only had your age!

**NURSE:** We're a little worn, but since I've worked hard, I'm well-oiled, while you, in using the armchair, your legs have withered.

**AUNT:** You think I haven't worked?

**NURSE:** With your fingertips, with thread, with stalks, jam; but I worked with my shoulders, knees, fingernails.

**AUNT:** So to run a household is not working?

**NURSE:** It's harder work scrubbing floors.

**AUNT:** I won't argue with that.

**NURSE:** Why not? It passes the time. Go on. Answer me back. But we've ended up like mutes. Before, there was always shouting. 'What about this, what about the other, what about the custard, why aren't there more sheets?'...

**AUNT:** I'm resigned....one day it's soup, the next only crumbs: with my glass of water and my rosary in my pocket, I'll await death with dignity...But when I think of Rosita!

**NURSE:** That's what hurts!

**AUNT:** (*Excitedly*) When I think of the wrong he did her, and the terrible deceit he practised and the falsehood in that man's heart, who is no longer my family and not worthy enough to be part of my family, I'd like to be twenty years old and board that steamboat, and go to Tucumán, and take a whip...

**NURSE:** (*Interrupting*) ...and take a sword, and cut off his head, and crush it between two stones, and cut off that hand that wrote those false promises and those lying words of affection.

**AUNT:** Yes, and let him pay with blood for the blood he has cost, even if he is of my blood, and then...

**NURSE:** ...scatter his ashes over the sea.

**AUNT:** Resurrect him, and bring him here to Rosita, to obtain satisfaction for my family's honour.

**NURSE:** So now you agree with me.

**AUNT:** I do.

**NURSE:** There he met that rich woman he was seeking and married her, but he should have told Rosita at the time. Because who will love the girl now? Now she has faded! Señora, couldn't we send a poisoned letter that would kill him when he opened it?

**AUNT:** The things you say! Eight years of marriage, and only last month the wretch writes to tell me the truth. I knew it from his letters; the proxy never arrived, an ambiguous tone...he didn't dare, but in the end he did. Of course it was after his father died! And that creature...

**NURSE:** Hush...!

**AUNT:** And take those two jars.

*(Rosita appears. She is dressed in bright pink in the fashion of 1910. Her hair is done in curls. She has aged greatly.)*

**NURSE:** Child!

**ROSITA:** What are you doing?

**NURSE:** Grumbling a little. And you, where are you off to?

**ROSITA:** I'm going to the conservatory. Have you removed the pots already?

**NURSE:** There are a few left.

*(Rosita goes out. The two women wipe away tears.)*

**NURSE:** And now what? You sit here, and I sit here? And keep silent? And not seek justice? And not have the courage to make a fuss...?

**AUNT:** Be quiet, don't pursue it!

**NURSE:** I have no power to endure these things without my heart pounding in my chest as if I were a dog being chased. When I buried my husband I felt it deeply, but deep down I felt a great happiness...happiness no...a thrill to realise that it was not I who was being buried. When I buried my little girl...you understand? When I buried my little girl it was as if my guts were being trampled on, but the dead are dead. They are dead, we mourn, we close the door, and we go on living! But all this to do with Rosita is worse. It is to seek a corpse and not find it; it's to weep without knowing what you are weeping for; it's to sigh for someone you know, who shouldn't deserve sighs. It's an open wound that bleeds an endless trickle of blood, and there is no one, no one on earth, who can bring the swabs, or bandages for it, or a precious lump of snow.

**AUNT:** What do you want me to do?

**NURSE:** Let the river carry us away.

**AUNT:** In old age everyone turns their back on us.

**NURSE:** While I have arms nothing is lacking.

**AUNT:** *(Pause. In a lower voice, as if ashamed.)* I cannot pay your wages! You will have to leave us.

**NURSE:** What! What breeze is that blowing through the window! What...! Or perhaps I'm going deaf? Well...do you want me to sing? Like the little girls going home from school! *(Children's voices are heard)* Do you hear, Señora? My Senora: more my Señora than ever. *(She embraces her.)*

**AUNT:** I hear.

**NURSE:** I'm going to cook something. A dish of mackerel fragrant with fennel.

**AUNT:** Listen!

**NURSE:** And for dessert a meringue, a *Monte Nevado*! I'll make a *Monte Nevado* with coloured dragees...

**AUNT:** But, woman!

**NURSE:** *(Loudly)* Is Don Martín there! Don Martín, come here a moment! Here! Entertain the Señora a while.

*(She exits quickly. Don Martín enters. He is an old man with red hair. He uses a crutch which supports a withered leg. A noble individual, of great dignity, with a certain air of sadness.)*

**AUNT:** Bless my sight!

**MARTÍN:** When is the final departure?

**AUNT:** Today.

**MARTÍN:** Where will you go?

**AUNT:** Our new house is not like this. But it has good views and a little patio with two fig trees where you can grow flowers.

**MARTÍN:** That's not so bad. (*They sit down.*)

**AUNT:** And how are you?

**MARTÍN:** The same as ever. I came here to give my tutorial. It was truly hellish. It was a beautiful lecture: 'The Concept and Definition of Harmony' but of no interest to the youngsters at all. And what youngsters! I, whom they consider a waste of time, they show a little respect to; sometimes a pin or something in the backside or a puppet on one's shoulder, but they do terrible things to my colleagues. They're the children of the rich and, since they pay, they can't be punished. Or so the Headmaster always tells us. Yesterday it involved poor Señor Canito, the new Geography professor, who wears a corset, because his body is a little distorted; when he was alone in the courtyard, the older boys and the boarders stripped him to the waist, tied him to one of the pillars along the walk, and drenched him with a jar of water over the balcony.

**AUNT:** The poor creature!

**MARTÍN:** Every day I tremble as I enter the college, waiting for what they might do to me, though, as I say, they respect my misfortune somewhat. There was a huge scandal a while ago when Señor Cosuegra, who is an admirable teacher of Latin, found cat excrement on his class list.

**AUNT:** They are like enemies!

**MARTÍN:** They are the one that pay, and so they behave accordingly. And believe me the parents laugh at their pranks, because as we are only like

tutors, and are not about to examine their children, they consider us as men devoid of feelings, as people situated in the lowest class of society, who nevertheless still wear a decent collar and tie.

**AUNT:** Oh Don Martin! What a world it is!

**MARTÍN:** What a world! I always dreamed of being a poet. They said I had natural talent, and I wrote a play which was never staged.

**AUNT:** *'The Daughter of Jephthah'?*

**MARTÍN:** That was it.

**AUNT:** Rosita and I have read it. You gave us a copy. We have read it four or five times!

**MARTÍN:** (*Anxiously*) And what did you think...?

**AUNT:** I liked it a lot. I've always said so. Especially when she is going to die, and thinks about her mother and the flames.

**MARTÍN:** It is strong, right? A true drama. A drama in shape and concept. I was never able to have it performed. (*He starts to recite.*)

'Oh sublime mother! Turn your gaze  
on one who sunk in vile torpor lies;  
Welcome all the glittering rewards  
and the fearful tremor of my struggle!'

Is that bad? Are not the stresses and the caesura fine in that line: 'and the fearful tremor of my struggle?'

**AUNT:** Beautiful! Beautiful!

**MARTÍN:** And when Glucinius goes to meet Isaiah, and lifts the hanging of the tent...

**NURSE:** (*Interrupting*) Through here.

(*Two workers entered dressed in corduroy.*)

**FIRST WORKER:** Good afternoon.

**AUNT AND MARTIN:** (*Together*) Good afternoon.

**NURSE:** This is the one! (*She points to a large sofa at the back of the room.*)

(*The men carry it out slowly as if carrying a coffin. The Nurse follows them. Silence. We hear two chimes of a church bell as the men leave with the sofa.*)

**MARTÍN:** Is that the Novena for Saint Gertrude the Great?

**AUNT:** Yes at the Church of San Antón.

**MARTÍN:** It is very hard to become a poet! (*The men exit.*) After that I wanted to be a pharmacist. That's a tranquil life.

**AUNT:** My brother, who is in glory, was a pharmacist.

**MARTÍN:** But it was not possible. I had to help my mother and became a professor. That's why I envied your husband so much. He was what I wished to be.

**AUNT:** And it caused his ruin!

**MARTÍN:** Yes, but it's worse to be me.

**AUNT:** But you are still a writer.

**MARTÍN:** I don't know why I write, because I've no illusions about it, yet it's the only thing I enjoy. Did you read my story yesterday in the second edition of the magazine, in '*Mentalidad Granadina*'?

**AUNT:** '*Matilda's Birthday*'. Yes, we read it; it was beautiful.

**MARTÍN:** Is it so? There I wanted to renew myself by creating something with a present-day atmosphere; I even have an aeroplane in it! I must be truly modern. Of course what matter most to me are my sonnets.

**AUNT:** To the Nine Muses of Parnassus!

**MARTÍN:** To the Ten, the Ten. Don't you remember that I called Rosita the Tenth Muse?

**NURSE:** (*Entering*) Senora, help me fold this blanket. (*They fold it between them.*) Don Martín, with the red hair! Why have you not married, man of God? You would be less lonely in life!

**MARTÍN:** I've never wanted to!

**NURSE:** It's because now it doesn't please you to. Speaking in that precious way of of yours!

**AUNT:** Let's hope you fall in love.

**MARTÍN:** Little chance of that!

**NURSE:** When he lectures in the room downstairs in the college, I go to the boiler-room to listen: 'What is an idea?' 'The intellectual representation of a thing or an object.' Is that right?

**MARTÍN:** Listen to her! Marvellous!

**NURSE:** Yesterday he shouted: 'No, it's a hyperbaton, an inversion of words' and later... 'the epinicion, a song of victory'...I wanted to understand it all, but since I couldn't I wanted to laugh, and the boiler-man who is forever reading a book called *The Ruins of Palmyra*, echoed my grimaces as though we were pair of rabid cats. But though I laugh, like an ignoramus, I know Don Martín has great merit.

**MARTÍN:** No one today grants merit to Rhetoric or Poetry or the university culture.

*(The Nurse exits rapidly with the folded blanket.)*

**AUNT:** What can we do? There's little time left to us here.

**MARTÍN:** We must employ it in kindness and sacrifice.

*(Voices are heard.)*

**AUNT:** What is that?

**NURSE:** *(Appearing)* Don Martín, you must go to the college because the students have split a water pipe with a nail, and all the classrooms are flooded.

**MARTÍN:** I must go. I dreamed of being a Parnassian and I must act as a plumber and mason. As long as they don't push me, and I don't slip...  
*(The Nurse helps Don Martín to his feet.)*

*(Voices are heard.)*

**NURSE:** Off you go, now! Oh for a little peace and quiet! Let's hope the water rises quickly and there's not a student left alive!

**MARTÍN:** *(Leaving)* Blessed be the Lord!

**AUNT:** Poor man, what a fate is yours!

**NURSE:** Look in that mirror. This very person irons his collars and darns his socks, and when he was sick, and I took him some custard, he had only a bed with sheets as black as charcoal, and four walls and a little washbasin...ay!

**AUNT:** As do others, plenty of them!

**NURSE:** That's why I always say: 'Cursed, cursed be the rich! Nothing shall survive of them, not even their fingernails!

**AUNT:** Forget about them!

**NURSE:** But I'm certain they go headlong to Hell. Where do you think Don Rafael Salé is now, that exploiter of the poor, whom they buried yesterday, God forgive him, with all those nuns and priests and all that chanting? In Hell! And he cries: 'Take my twenty million pesetas, but don't squeeze me with the pincers! I'll give you two hundred thousand if you'll take those coals from my feet!' but the demons burn here, and burn there, struggle how you may, strike you in the face, till your blood is turned to charcoal.

**AUNT:** Every Christian knows that the rich can't enter the kingdom of Heaven, but be careful talking that way doesn't send you headlong to Hell as well.

**NURSE:** To Hell, me? With the first kick I give Old Nick's cauldron, I'll supply the whole world with hot water. No Senora, no. I will go to Heaven for sure. (*Gently*) Like you. Each of us sitting in our very own rocking-chair upholstered with heavenly silk, holding a red satin fan. Between us, on a swing twined with jasmine and rosemary, Rosita will be swinging away, and behind her your husband, covered with roses, just as he went in his coffin from this house; with the same smile, with the same pale brow as if made of glass, and you there rocking away, and I, and Rosita swinging, and behind her your husband throwing roses, as if we were all three on a float, one made of mother-of-pearl and covered with candles and flounces, in the Holy Week procession.

**AUNT:** And may the handkerchiefs for our tears be left behind down here.

**NURSE:** Let them. A heavenly spree for us!

**AUNT:** Because now there's not a single one left in our hearts!

**FIRST WORKMAN:** You must tell us what you want us to do.

**NURSE:** Come. (*They exit. From the doorway.*) Courage!

**AUNT:** God bless you! (*She sits down slowly.*)

(*Rosita appears with a packet of letters in her hands. Silence.*)

**AUNT:** Have they taken the chest of drawers already?

**ROSITA:** Just now. Your cousin Hope sent a lad to fetch a screwdriver.

**AUNT:** They'll be setting up the beds for tonight. We must leave soon and make sure everything is as we want it. My cousin will have arranged the furniture any old how.

**ROSITA:** But I'd prefer to leave here when the streets are dark. If only I could quench the street-lights. Whatever happens, the neighbours will spy on us. All day long, with our moving house, the doorway has been full of little children, as though someone had died here.

**AUNT:** If I had known I would never have allowed your uncle to mortgage the house, furniture and all. What we are taking is barely enough, a chair to sit on and a bed to sleep in.

**ROSITA:** To die in.

**AUNT:** A fine trick he played on us! Tomorrow the new owners arrive! I wish your uncle could see us. The old fool! Cowardly in business! Mad for his roses! A man with no concept of money! Ruining me, day by day. 'Here is Fulano'; and: 'Let him come in'; and he would enter with empty pockets and leave with them full of silver, and it was always: 'Don't let my wife find out.' Extravagant and weak! And there was no disaster but he must remedy it...no child but he must help, because..., because...he had a bigger heart than anyone...the purest of Christian souls...; no, no, hush old woman! Be silent, chatterbox, and respect God's will! Ruined! Well then, silence! But I look at you...

**NURSE:** Don't think of me, aunt. I know the mortgage paid for my furniture and my trousseau, and that is what grieves me.

**AUNT:** It was well done. You deserved it all. And everything we bought is worthy of you, and will be beautiful the day you come to use it.

**ROSITA:** The day I come to use it?

**AUNT:** Of course! The day you are married.

**ROSITA:** Don't let's talk about it.

**AUNT:** That's what wrong with the decent women in this world. We don't talk! We don't talk and we should talk. (*Loudly*) Nurse! Has the post arrived?

**ROSITA:** What do you suggest?

**AUNT:** Watch how I behave, and you will learn.

**ROSITA:** (*Embracing her.*) Hush.

**AUNT:** Sometimes I have to speak out. Get away from these four walls, my child. Don't give in to misfortune.

**ROSITA:** (*Kneeling before her.*) For many years I grew accustomed to living beyond myself, thinking of things that were far away, and now those things no longer exist I go on giving more and more to that cold emptiness, seeking an escape I have never found. I knew everything. I knew he had married; he had charged a kind soul with telling me, and I went on receiving his letters, embracing an illusion, so full of sighs that I even deceived myself. If no one had said anything; if you had not known; if no one had known but me, his letters and his lies would have sustained my illusion, just as in the first year of his absence. But everyone knew, and I was met with pointing fingers that mocked my chastity as a fiancée, and made my spinster's fan appear grotesque. Every year that passed was like a secret pledge that withered my flesh. One day a friend marries then another and another, and tomorrow has a grown-up child, and comes to show me its school report, and they make new homes and new songs, and I am the same, with the same emotions,

the same; I am the same as before, cutting the same carnations, gazing at the same clouds; and one day I'm out walking and I realise I no longer know anyone; the boys and girls leave me behind because I bore them, and one says: 'Oh, that's the old maid'; and another, a handsome boy, with curly hair, comments: 'No one will have her now.' And I hear him and I can't say a word, only walk on swiftly, with a mouth full of poison, and an enormous desire to run away, to throw off my shoes, and rest and not move again, ever, from my corner.

**AUNT:** Child! Rosita!

**ROSITA:** Now I am old. Yesterday I heard Nurse say that I might still marry. There is no way. Don't think it. I have lost hope now of having him whom I loved with all my heart, whom I loved...whom I love. Everything is finished...and yet, with all illusions gone, I still wake with the most dreadful of feelings, the feeling of nursing a hope that is dead. I want to run, I want not to see; I want to be left calm, empty... (Doesn't a wretched woman have the right to breathe freely?) Yet hope pursues me, circles me, bites me, like a dying wolf snapping its teeth for the last time.

**AUNT:** Why didn't I see this? Why didn't you marry someone else?

**ROSITA:** I was promised, and besides, what man ever came to this house truly overflowing with desire to win my affection? None.

**AUNT:** You never took any notice of them. You were blinded by a deceitful lover.

**ROSITA:** I have always been a serious person.

**AUNT:** You clung to an idea without seeing the reality, taking no heed for your future.

**ROSITA:** I am what I am. And I can't change. The one thing left to me is my dignity. What I have within I keep for myself alone.

**AUNT:** That is not what I wish.

**NURSE:** (*Entering swiftly*) Nor I! Talk to us, unburden yourself; then we can be filled with tears the three of us, and share our feelings.

**ROSITA:** And what should I talk of? There are things that can't be said because there are no words in which to say them; and if there were, no one would understand their meaning. You would understand if I asked for bread or water or even a kiss, but no one can understand or remove this dark hand, that freezes or burns my heart, I don't know which, whenever I'm alone.

**AUNT:** That is talking at least.

**AUNT:** For everything there is consolation.

**ROSITA:** It's a never-ending tale. I know my eyes will stay young always, while my back will curve more each day. After all what has happened to me happens to thousands of women. (*Pause.*) But why am I speaking of it? (*To the Nurse*) Go and arrange our things, because in a short while we'll be leaving this house and garden, and you, aunt, must not think of me. (*Pause. To the Nurse*) Go on! I don't like being looked at that way. That gaze like a faithful dog's annoys me. (*The Nurse goes out.*) Those looks of pity disturb me and anger me.

**AUNT:** Child, what do you want me to do?

**ROSITA:** Treat me as a lost thing. (*Pause. She walks about.*) Already I know you will be thinking of your sister the spinster...a spinster like me. She was sour and odious to children and every woman who put on a new dress...but I will not be like that. (*Pause.*) I ask forgiveness.

**AUNT:** What nonsense.

(*A boy about eighteen years old appears at the back of the room.*)

**ROSITA:** Let's go.

**BOY:** Are you ready?

**ROSITA:** In a few moments. When it grows dark.

**AUNT:** Who is this?

**ROSITA:** It's Maria's son.

**AUNT:** Which Maria?

**ROSITA:** The elder of my three former girlfriends.

**AUNT:** Ah!

'Who go to the Alhambra  
three or four alone.'

Forgive my poor memory, child.

**BOY:** I have only met you a few times.

**AUNT:** Of course! But I liked your mother very much. How witty she was!  
She died at the same time as my husband.

**ROSITA:** Earlier.

**BOY:** Eight years ago.

**ROSITA:** And he has the same face as hers.

**BOY:** (*Cheerfully*) Not so pretty. It's taken a bit of a hammering.

**AUNT:** And the same wit, the same personality!

**BOY:** Of course, I resemble her. At the Carnival I wore my mother's  
dress...one from the old days...in green...

**ROSITA:** (*Sadly*) With black bows, and puffed out with green Nile silk.

**BOY:** Yes.

**ROSITA:** And a broad velvet ribbon at the waist.

**BOY:** That's it.

**ROSITA:** That hangs down on either side of the skirt.

**BOY:** Exactly! What a ridiculous style. (*He laughs*)

**ROSITA:** (*Sadly*) It was a lovely fashion!

**BOY:** You don't say! Well I nearly died laughing dressed in that old thing, filling all the hallway of the house with the smell of camphor, and suddenly my aunt started crying bitterly because she said it was like seeing the very image of my mother. I was upset, of course, and I left the dress and the mask on my bed.

**ROSITA:** There is nothing more living than a memory. They can make life impossible. That is why I have a profound understanding of those old drunken women who wander through the streets trying to erase the world, who sit and sing on the benches in the avenue.

**AUNT:** And your aunt is married?

**BOY:** He writes from Barcelona. Less each time.

**ROSITA:** Are there any children?

**BOY:** Four.

(*Pause.*)

**NURSE:** (*Entering*) Give me your keys to the cupboard. (*The Aunt gives her them, for the Boy.*) This lad here was with his girlfriend yesterday. I saw them in the Plaza Nueva. She wanted to hide in a side street but he wouldn't let her. (*She laughs.*)

Doña Rosita the Spinster and the Language of Flowers

**AUNT:** Ha, look at him blush!

**BOY:** (*Embarrassed*) We were just fooling about.

**NURSE:** Don't blush then! (*Exiting*)

**ROSITA:** Hush, let's be going.

**BOY:** What a beautiful garden you have!

**ROSITA:** We had!

**AUNT:** Go, and cut some flowers.

**BOY:** Take care, Doña Rosita.

**ROSITA:** Go with God, my lad!

(*He leaves. Dusk is falling.*)

Doña Rosita! *Doña...*Rosita!  
When it opens in the morning,  
It glows as red as blood.  
In the afternoon it's white,  
White as the white salt spray.  
And when the night falls  
It begins to fade.

(*Pause.*)

**NURSE:** (*Entering with a shawl*) Away with us!

**ROSITA:** Yes, I'm going to put a coat on.

**NURSE:** Since I've taken the hangars, it's hooked over the window catch.

*(The Third Spinster enters, dressed in black, with a mourning veil over her head and face, which she has worn for twelve years. She speaks quietly.)*

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Nurse!

**NURSE:** We only have a few minutes left.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** I'm here to give a piano lesson nearby, and I came to see if you needed anything.

**NURSE:** God bless you!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** What a terrible thing!

**NURSE:** Yes, yes, but don't trouble about me, don't lift your veil for me, because I'm the one who should give encouragement in the midst of all this mourning with no death that you are witnessing.

**THIRD SPINSTER:** I would like to speak to them.

**NURSE:** It's better that you don't see them. Go out the other way!

**THIRD SPINSTER:** Perhaps, it is better. But if you need anything, if there's anything I can do, I am here.

**NURSE:** Now bad weather's coming! *(They hear the sound of the wind.)*

**THIRD SPINSTER:** The wind is rising!

**NURSE:** Yes. Perhaps it will rain.

*(The Third Spinster exits.)*

**AUNT:** *(Entering.)* With this wind blowing there won't be a single rose left. The cypresses on the circle are almost brushing the walls outside my room. It seems as if something wants to make the garden ugly so that we won't feel the pain of leaving it.

**NURSE:** It has never been so beautiful, so beautiful. Put on your coat. And this shawl...There, you are wrapped up well. (*She puts it round her.*) Now, when we arrive, I have a meal ready. A flan; like a golden carnation. (*The Nurse speaks in a voice clouded by deep emotion.*) (*A loud bang is heard.*)

**AUNT:** It's the door of the conservatory. Why didn't you close it?

**NURSE:** It won't close because of the damp.

**AUNT:** It will make that banging noise all night.

**NURSE:** Well we won't hear it...!

(*The stage is in gentle evening shadow.*)

**AUNT:** I will. I will hear it.

(*Rosita appears. She is pale, dressed in white, with a coat covering her to the edge of her dress.*)

**NURSE:** (*Courageously*) Let's go!

**ROSITA:** (*In a faint voice*) It's begun to rain. So there'll be no one on their balcony to watch us leave.

**AUNT:** It's for the best.

**ROSITA:** (*Swaying a little, she leans on a chair and falls into it, supported by the Nurse and the Aunt, who prevent her fainting completely.*)

**ROSITA:** 'And when the night falls  
It begins to fade.'

(*They leave, and the stage remains empty after their exit. The door is heard banging. Suddenly the door to a balcony opens at the rear of the stage, and white curtains are seen blowing in the wind.*)

*Curtain*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) is primarily known for his poetry and plays, which opened Spanish literature of the early twentieth century to influences from the wider European literary movements, such as symbolism and surrealism. Born near Granada, he attended university there and in Madrid. His early interest in painting, music and literature led to both his first attempts at a poetic language and his deep interest in Spanish folk music and lore, and the *Gypsy Ballads* of 1928, expressing this interest, is perhaps his best known and most evocative collection of poems. His later poetry, escaping to some extent from this folk tradition, which he viewed as artistically limiting, expresses the vicissitudes of love and longing, and a degree of personal anguish. His mature plays, translated here, expressing socially liberal views, made him a target for the increasingly powerful right-wing forces that led to the Franco regime, and resulted in his execution by Nationalist militia in August 1936, probably on the grounds of both his socialist politics and his sexuality. His works were banned under the Franco regime until 1953. He is now regarded as, arguably, the greatest poet writing in the Spanish language of the early twentieth century.

## ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR



Anthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.