

Federico García Lorca

Blood Wedding

(Bodas de sangre)

1933

A tragedy in three acts and seven scenes

Act I

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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?

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?

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.

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 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.

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?

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.

(*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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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

(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.*)

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.

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.*)

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!

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?

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.)

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!

(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.

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.*)

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?

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.

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?

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.

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*) 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.

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!
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.

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 Beggar-woman.)

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.)

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?

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.
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.

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)

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