

HIPPOLYTA: (*Overlapping*) No! Please! Your Grace! Stop! Clarina! Help! Murder! Murder!

PRIDAMANT: He isn't dead, he isn't dead....

CLARINA: (*Entering*) Oh, pity on my soul, Your Majesty, what have you done?

THE PRINCE: Nothing that the law would not have done. My wife, like my crown, Are cornerstones in the edifice of state. He should have known better.

HIPPOLYTA: Assassin.

PRIDAMANT: ASSASSIN! MURDERER! Alcandre, turn it back, I...my heart...

THE PRINCE: Hippolyta, don't anger me. Justice has been done for you as well; He never was worthy of your love.

HIPPOLYTA: (*Falling*) I can't breathe, Clarina, I'm suffocating.

(*She collapses; the lights begin to fade.*)

CLARINA: She's fainted. Help me. Oh, God, she's cold, like him, Already dead....

PRIDAMANT: NO! DON'T GO! THIS CANNOT BE! MY SON!

(*A great red curtain falls. PRIDAMANT rushes toward it. PRIDAMANT tears down the curtain. There's nothing behind it.*)

PRIDAMANT: Gone... (*He puts his finger to the corner of his eye.*) Look. What is this? (*His finger is wet.*) What's happened to my eyes? Am I bleeding? No, it's clear, not blood. Some kind of liquid. (*He eats the tear.*) Mmmm. Salty, but quite delicious.

ALCANDRE: Ah. Good. Save a peck for me. (*He goes to PRIDAMANT, plucks a tear from his eye, holds it aloft between the thumb and forefinger.*) This, this jewel. This precious, leaded crystal pendant. This diamond Dolorosa, so hard fought for, so hard won, this food, my sustenance, for this infinitesimal seepage, for this atom of remorse, for this little globe, this microcosm in which loss, love, sorrow, consequence dwell in miniature, for this iota, this splintered particle of grief, for this I turn the gumstuck machinery, erect the rickety carpentry of my illusions. For this: to see your granite heart soften, just a bit.

PRIDAMANT: My heart, magician, doesn't soften, though under considerable duress, it breaks. Scar tissue forms. He's dead. His poor, unhappy wife. I'll join him soon. They could have dug a single grave for us both. I never dreamed I'd outlive him. Terrible day, to have seen that.... My eyes hurt, I want never to see again.

ALCANDRE: I have nothing more to show. It's over now.

PRIDAMANT: Finished, yes. It's over.

ALCANDRE: And I'm sure you're anxious to be on your way; at a steady gallop you might make Paris by morning.

PRIDAMANT: Paris? Why on earth would I go there?

ALCANDRE: To...see your son, of course.

PRIDAMANT: To see...? Is he buried in Paris, then?

ALCANDRE: Buried?

PRIDAMANT: I don't want to see his tomb; I hate boneyards, visiting the dead, wax flowers and weeping; it's a ghoulish custom.

ALCANDRE: There seems to be some...misunderstanding here, he's.... Oh, my.

PRIDAMANT: Yes?

ALCANDRE: Your son.

PRIDAMANT: What about him?

ALCANDRE: Well—

(Pause; ALCANDRE looks to THE AMANUENSIS for help; THE AMANUENSIS only shrugs.)

ALCANDRE: He isn't dead.

PRIDAMANT: He...I beg your pardon.

ALCANDRE: Your son's not dead, sir. Not really dead. I merely showed him to you in his present occupation, these...these scenes you watched are from a theatrical repertoire. Scenes from plays. Your son...

PRIDAMANT: Is alive?

ALCANDRE: Is an actor.

PRIDAMANT: Alive?

ALCANDRE: Oh, but yes, alive!

PRIDAMANT: Alive! Alive my son! Alive! I thought....

ALCANDRE: You didn't think this was real? Oh, I do apologize for that, sir, I do, I thought anyone could see.... Oh dear, oh dear, these mooncalves and mockturtles made of illusion and reality, they slip and they slither; I ought to be more careful, more punctilious; really, the distress you must have felt, it's inexcusable.

PRIDAMANT: Where? Where is he?

ALCANDRE: A charming little boulevard theater in Paris near the Tuilleries.

(He gestures to THE AMANUENSIS, who gives PRIDAMANT a card with an address.)

ALCANDRE: Twelve performances a week. Before I sealed myself up in this hermitage, I was frequently in attendance there. But that, ah well, that was years ago....

PRIDAMANT: *(Putting on coat, starting to exit)* I can go to him, I can hold him again, kiss him and apologize, beg forgiveness, I can leave behind this void, this cold and haunted emptiness, and clutch him to me, warm and strong and breathing and...breathing...he.... *(He stops in his tracks.)* He's...an actor, you say. Tell me something. That look I saw, the dangerous one—was that real, or feigned, then?

ALCANDRE: Real or feigned? I've no idea.

PRIDAMANT: Then none of his life, this, none of it real, not a fighter, an adventurer, not a pummeler of aristocrats—none of that?

ALCANDRE: No.

PRIDAMANT: No. He's an actor. I don't know that I like that. The theater—all that effort devoted to building a make-believe world out of angel hair and fancy talk, no more substantial than a soap bubble. You are moved at the sight of a foul murder—then the murderer and the murdered are holding hands, taking bows together. It's sinister. *end*

ALCANDRE: Oh, not so sinister. What in this world is not evanescent? What in this world is real and not seeming? Love, which seems the realest thing, is really nothing at all; a simple grey rock is a thousand times more tangible than love is; and the earth is such a rock, and love only a breeze that dreams over its surface, weightless and traceless; and yet love's more mineral, more dense, more veined with gold and corrupted with lead, more bitter and more weighty than the earth's profoundest matter. Love is a sea of desire stretched between shores — only the shores are real, but how much more compelling is the sea. Love is the world's