



Hieronimo

or The Spanish Tragedy

after Thomas Kyd

revised and slightly modernized by Christian Lanciai (2002, translated 2018)

Dramatis personae:

Venganza
Andrea, fallen knight
King of Spain
his general
Don Cypriano of Castille, his brother
Lorenzo, his son and nephew to the King
Princess Bel-Imperia, his sister
Marshal Hieronimo
Isabella, his wife
Horatio, their son
Prince Balthasar of Portugal
a Portuguese ambassador

Pedringano, a valet
Serberino, another valet
King of Portugal
Villuppo
Alejandro
a page
two guards
a messenger
a notary
three citizens with petitions
an old man
a servant

The action is in Spain and Portugal during the Renaissance.

The Argument

In a battle between Spain and Portugal the Spanish knight Andrea falls, and Don Balthasar, son of the king of Portugal and heir to the throne, is taken prisoner by Horatio, the son of the Spanish marshal Hieronimo, the King's oldest and most faithful servant, and by Don Lorenzo, the King's nephew, son to Don Cypriano, the King's brother. He also has a daughter, the beautiful Bel-Imperia, Lorenzo's sister, who was Andrea's love and betrothed. She is unconsolable after his death.

Don Balthasar is entrusted in the care of Don Lorenzo, but as Horatio treated him better, Don Balthasar asks him to keep him company in his imprisonment in expectation of the Portuguese ransom. The Spanish King immediately sees an opportunity to make peace by joining Don Balthasar and his niece Bel-Imperia in marriage, but Bel-Imperia takes a liking to Horatio, and they become lovers. Don Balthasar can not accept that, and together with Don Lorenzo they decide to do away with Horatio. That's the beginning of the great and complicated plot.

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Prologue.

Venganza What's wrong, my friend?

Andrea I sigh about the life that I have lost.

Venganza That's no good sighing for.

Andrea I loved.

Venganza You're loving still. You'll never do without your love.

Andrea But I am dead, while the one I loved is still alive.

Venganza Not for long.

Andrea What do you mean?

Venganza I am familiar with your case, my friend. You were among the elites in the princely corridors of power. Who is torn away by violence from that merry-go-round will not wait long until he will have company of many good old friends.

Andrea Is that supposed to be some comfort?

Venganza I just wished to cheer you up. Some mirth at others' harm is probably the only joy available for us the dead.

Andrea You bring no joy and are no good.

Venganza My friend, I am your curate for eternity. I only wish to teach you some good patience to regard the world more calmly with detachment, which you will get soon enough. You learn from being dead.

Andrea You are Venganza, vengeance, if I understand you well. How could I have revenge? I am too miserable, tired and unhappy to be able even to desire it.

Venganza Be calm and take it easy. It will all resolve itself. All that you need to do is wait, and with time you'll see the corpses of your enemies come floating down the river more dead than yourself.

Andrea Is that supposed to be a comfort?

Venganza I bring you no comfort but will only teach you realism. Everything will be arranged, if only you will let it all arrange itself.

Andrea You are a strange one for a curate.

Venganza I have no ambition to accomplish cures, but only to present how everything will cure itself, if only you allow it. The great art is to let destiny do all the work for you and never fight your destiny.

Andrea That's fatalism.

Venganza No, pragmatism.

Andrea I don't believe in you, but I should still give your philosophy a chance.

Venganza It will pay off. You'll see. You can't imagine to what lengths the mortals readily will go to perish in the self-deceit of their own vanity.

Andrea Your cynicism alarms me.

Venganza Cynicism is realism. Just view it positively, and reality will seem more entertaining in its comic aspects than as the depressing dismalhorrible reality it is.

Andrea You promiseentertainment by catastrophes and tragedies.

Venganza And what could be more entertaining?

Andrea I would rather stick to life.

Venganza That does no good and only lives to thrive in its perdition.

Andrea I am sceptical against your cynicism.

Venganza Just lean back, my friend, and take it easy in enjoying death that you have won while all still living in their folly rush and bolt to reach it.

Andrea Let's see if you are correct. I doubt it.

Venganza The conflict between Portugal and Spain have now brought your own murderer to prison in Castille at the Castilian king's intriguing court. You'll see how life's abundant richness, avarice and beauty will bring forth the mad greed of more power with the plotters. Now the play begins. Don't interfere, but let the madness of the mechanisms of vanity go berserk round the world, as something of its deadliest fever, for there is no illness more severe than what they all are striving for.

Andrea Life after death?

Venganza No, death by power.

Andrea Then let's see if there is something in your theories.

Act I scene 1. The Spanish court.

King A day of joy has been bestowed on us by heavenly powers! Lovely is your victory over the Portuguese, my vassals, knights and noblemen! When Spain triumphs, the whole world will make progress in her name, since Spanish happiness means welfare and good fortune across all the world!

General The greatest of our losses was the fall of Don Andrea by the hand of the most noble prince Don Balthasar of Portugal.

King Don Andrea? Bel-Imperia's suitor? That will be a hard blow to the Princess. Widows face no easy life, but it is worse to lose a husband even before you are married. But you won the battle anyway?

General With flying colours, thanks to most of all the son of marshal Hieronimo, our noble knight Horatio.

King Hieronimo, you are reliability impersonated. Wherever you appear there is but fortune, happiness, success, perfection and accomplishment. If it was your son who turned the battle to its victory, he shall be crowned with royal honours.

Hieronimo We are as always at your service, gracious majesty. *(flourish)*

General But that's not all. We still have all the best to show, which we have saved for something of a final touch. Let the command bring in the prisoners!
(Enter the militaries with prisoners. In the lead are Lorenzo and Horatio with Balthasar as prisoner between them.)

King You bring the loveliest surprises! Is that not Balthasar himself, the unconquerable prince of Portugal?

General It is himself, whom we have taken prisoner.

King And who walks there beside him? Who succeeded in defeating him?

Hieronimo It pleases me, your majesty, to answer that it is my son Horatio, at your service.

Horatio Always ready at your service at all times, your majesty.

King This is magnificent indeed. But you are two who guard this prisoner. Who is most worthy of the honour?

Lorenzo It was I who caused his horse to stumble.

Horatio But it was my lance that cast him off the saddle.

Lorenzo I dismantled and unarmed him.

Horatio But before that I forced him to lay his weapons down.

King It seems that it would be the prisoner himself who would best know the answer to this tricky issue. Prince Balthasar, tread forth! Take off your hands from him. Like in your palace home in Portugal, you will be treated with the same respect here of your royal dignity, and you have nothing more to fear. Your father will bring you your ransom, that is all, a plain formality, whereafter you will have your freedom back. But tell us now who has the honour of depriving you of all your liberty.

Balthasar One took me prisoner by chivalry, the other one by violence. One won me honourably by courtesy, the other one by strikes and blows. One promised me good grace and life and mercy, while the other wished to kill me. One of them won my affection, while the other won me by subjection. Therefore I am prisoner of both of them.

Hieronimo It's evident, your majesty, that our prince would rather have Horatio, my son, for his protector, than Lorenzo for his murderer.

King Good marshal, you are partial since Horatio is your son, so watch your tongue. Good gentlemen, I ask you to respect my verdict, which I find a just solution. Nephew, you have fought to have the prince's horse and weapons. Keep them. They are yours by every right. The ransom we shall have for Balthasar, however, shall belong to Don Horatio. Thus to each his own for proven bravery. The prisoner, however, shall be kept by Don Lorenzo, since he has enough resources to maintain and entertain a royal prisoner of highest rank, while your house, Don Horatio, is too poor. Do you accept my verdict?

Balthasar I have no objection but would rather see Horatio keep me company in Don Lorenzo's castle.

King Horatio, never let down such a royal friend who thus applies to you for company! Join him in his imprisonment, transforming it into the sweetest holiday of dearest friendship! Let's now celebrate the victory with great festivities to entertain ourselves and our guests! This day must never finish but to the salute of cannons to our toasts of happiness and welfare!

(breaks up, leading the way for the court to the banquet)

Scene 2. A garden.

Bel-Imperia I am inconsolable, refusing to believe my love is dead. It cannot happen. He is still around, I feel him constantly in front of me, as if he watched consistently his *Bel-Imperia*, his fiancée, this now poor wasted empty shell of grief, where all is emptiness and darkness in her formerly so joyous warm and loving heart. But here is now *Horatio*, the best friend of my beloved lost *Andrea*.

Horatio Pray, how are you, dearest princess?

Bel-Imperia As miserable as ever, and I still refuse accepting that *Andrea* is no longer with us.

Horatio I sincerely understand and empathize with your deep grief.

Bel-Imperia While the outrageous villain who took my beloved's life is walking freely around here and thriving like a spoilt and fancy dude, and you, *Andrea*'s friend, is courting him.

Horatio I am commanded thereto by his majesty. I have no choice.

Bel-Imperia They say that this *Don Balthasar* the killer holds you dear having taken a liking to you. But I thought you were *Andrea*'s friend, the best friend of the nobleman whom *Balthasar*, your new friend, killed.

Horatio My princess, *Don Andrea* fell in battle, dying on the battlefield of bravery in a most honourable death, killed as a soldier by a soldier whose main duty was to kill enemy soldiers. We eventually carried the day to victory and had the luck to catch him as a prisoner alive. That he then took a liking to his overlord was not my fault.

Bel-Imperia These men do always as well as they can but then irrevocably end up messing things up to make everything go wrong, and that's the only reason why they do at all make war. We women never start a war.

Horatio Don't you forget *Helen of Troy*?

Bel-Imperia You know how innocent she was. It was the crazy men who started war for her. They made her their excuse to war until they all went down and perished, the poor miserable fools. But I would rather have seen you kill *Balthasar*, *Andrea*'s murderer, than bring that dandy here to Spain into our homes, where he is princely entertained.

Horatio He is the royal son of Portugal. His rank gives him the right to privilege and royal flair if even he is our prisoner.

Bel-Imperia And I would rather see you courting me than following that fop.

Horatio I always did respect you, princess.

Bel-Imperia You were the best friend of my beloved. I have no one after him.

Horatio I only find my greatest honour in fulfillment of my duties towards you, but I must also carefully obey the king.

Bel-Imperia To court in flattery *Andrea*'s murderer?

Horatio He is as royal as the king, and they command me both by right of rank.

Bel-Imperia So leave me to amuse yourself then with that fag. Leave me alone with my unfathomable sorrow.

Horatio He is calling on me. I will soon be back, my dearest princess. (*leaves*)

Bel-Imperia Yes, he is my love, he knew Andrea well and will take over his part in my life. Andrea is no more and has left me alone, but there is still Horatio. Love me then, Horatio, and I will be yours and as faithful to you as to my Andrea's memory, for there is something in you of what I loved in Andrea. So do I live now only for my longing for the company of Don Horatio and the death with my Andrea. But his murderer is still at large, and there I find a duty of revenge. I still have reasons to hang on to life, if even the sole reason being death.

Lorenzo (entering with Bathasar) I find you walking here alone, my sister, with dark unsound clouds across your front, as if you laboured with sick thoughts.

Bel-Imperia Who doesn't? And do not forget: I am in mourning.

Lorenzo Your mourning is but vanity of self love, since the one you mourn is dead.

Bel-Imperia That's why I mourn him.

Lorenzo The living mourn the dead in vain. It is not rational. It is to waste the life and energy of sorrow into the dark chest of death.

Bel-Imperia But sorrow is a beautiful entity. Only the dead have made themselves deserving of its sacred purity and worthy of its elevated beauty, since the living just make of themselves a stinking nuisance.

Lorenzo But the living will all die, and they deserve that we are sorry for them, since they are alive.

Bel-Imperia Whom is it fit for me to mourn then? The only one I loved is dead, and I love him the more for being dead.

Lorenzo Here is a prince who gladly would enjoy your company.

Bel-Imperia What prince have you in mind?

Lorenzo Prince Balthasar of Portugal.

Balthasar (politely) If I can help you cure your sorrow, dearest princess, that would be my most delightful duty.

Bel-Imperia You were the one who killed my love. If you could bring him back alive to me and happy, that would be the success of your duty.

Lorenzo He died honourably honestly in battle, sister. That's the law of war.

Bel-Imperia And do you think that changes any aspect of the matter? He will anyway be just as dead, no less, no more, and here we have his murderer, who none the less will be his murderer.

Balthasar Unwillingly and absolutely unintentionally.

Bel-Imperia Try convincing someone else. No man kills unintentionally. Your false pretenses and flatteries disgust me. I desired but to be alone, but you would not allow me. Let me then just leave. *(leaves but drops a glove)*

Horatio (entering, picks it up) Princess, don't forget your glove.

Bel-Imperia My friend, pray keep it, for your kindness.

Balthasar You stooped in the right moment, Don Horatio.

Horatio That bequeathed on me a higher honour than I had deserved and wished for.

Lorenzo Don't take the fleeting flair of her caprice for serious. A woman's grace is like spoiling and seducing sunshine which immediately passes over for no reason

into rain and storm and thunder without explanation. Let's devote ourselves to better practices and sports than the loose grace of whimsical capricious ladies.

Horatio I came here just to be present at the party which the king will give the Portuguese ambassador, who has arrived with gifts and ransom for our guest the prince.

Balthasar Then I will surely have good news from home.

King (enters with ambassadors and followers) Well, what do you say now, your excellence? Who stands there if not Balthasar, your king's own son?

Ambassador What do I see? It's true! Prince Balthasar! Your father walks around at home in constant torment and distress and crying all day long believing you were lost!

Balthasar We did send word to Portugal that I was in good hands, well treated and well taken care of.

Ambassador No word of that kind has reached us. We bemoaned you, celebrating Requiem masses, the whole country clad in grief, as there was no doubt you were dead.

Balthasar I am but prisoner in the good care of friends, who keep me chained but in the pleasure of their games and in the beauty of their ladies. Yes, I am completely lost here in the pleasures of Madrid, where paradise is dominating the horizon with no end to joys and courtly beatitudes.

King Which only have begun. Let's now be merry at our party, for the one you thought was lost, ambassador, is more alive than ever and has by his personality united Portugal and Spain in a most wondrous unity of harmony and mind, which brings us all to wonder: why did we make war? However was it possible? We were one country on the same ground on the same peninsula, like brothers for all time, to say the least.

Ambassador Let's then celebrate this fact, endorsing and confirming peace between our lands preferably forever.

King Splendid! No one can object! So let us drown all sullen thoughts and lunacy of history in the one power that should always rule our lives: the sweetness of the elixir of life called wine.

Balthasar Never did a king speak wiser words.

King We are then all agreed on lasting peace of permanence.

Hieronimo May that continue in the same vein throughout your reign!

Horatio Cheers, father, to your providential diplomacy!

Balthasar (regarding Bel-Imperia) To beauty and to love forever!

Lorenzo (implying to the ambassador) A suitable match to seal our agreement with and perhaps to even finally unite our countries with?

Ambassador Why not?

Bel-Imperia Only I remain outside and do not trust the politics of artificial joy and celebration. Yes, get drunk, old men, and forget about reality, so that it may come stealing on you like the darkness from behind out of the cold night of the storm.

Strained joy of artifice is like the cold dead grin and empty grimace of a deathskull stuck in terror in its permanence of the eternity and inevitability of death.

(All the others indulge in cheers and party. Balthasar throws wishful glances at times at Imperia in agreement of mind with Lorenzo, while Horatio regards her more with some understanding.)

(Enter Andrea and Venganza at some distance.)

Andrea Did we come here from the eternity of the abysmal darkness only to behold the happiness and pleasures of my murderer? These parties hurt me more and are more painful than the cruellest autodafés.

Venganza Calm down. This is only the beginning. There are never any parties without their derailing. And the merrier the party, the more dreadful it will end.

Andrea They are too happy for my taste. I cannot stand it.

Venganza You won't have to suffer for much longer, for the intrigues have begun to form already by themselves.

Andrea So far they are only frames of mind, and you keep promising without a single sign of any progress.

Venganza Patience, my good friend! Soon you will be the lord and master of the banquets of festivities, when the others are collected for your harvest.

Andrea I begin to think the progress is too slow.

Venganza For the planning of a great event there must be firm foundations laid out carefully and slowly, if it is to work. Just take it easy! *(They leave. The party goes on.)*

Act II scene 1.

Lorenzo Don't give up, my dearest friend, for diligence must always win. No fruit will ripen without falling off the tree.

Balthasar It is my fault, not hers, that I have no success in reaching to her heart. I always fumbled by my clumsy methods. Maybe she could love me for my royal blood, but I am only still a prisoner. Perhaps she then could love me since I am your friend and you her brother, but I must suspect she has another aim in sight. Perhaps that she could love me if I made myself her thrall of love, but it could never end up well, and I suspect she isn't interested at all in all my love.

Lorenzo We'll manage her, I'm sure. If she loves someone else, we shall find out about it. Pedringano!

Pedringano Yes, my lord.

Lorenzo Spy my sister and find out to whom her heart belongs, but with discretion: she must not suspect that we investigate her private life.

Pedringano I might already know to whom her heart belongs.

Lorenzo If you reveal it, you shall have rewards in gold and jewels.

Pedringano Her heart belongs to Don Andrea.

Lorenzo But he is dead, you bloody knave!

Pedringano I know.

Lorenzo How can she love him then?

Pedringano Since he is dead.

Lorenzo Has she then had none other after him?

Pedringano None that I know of. She is constantly in mourning, crying after him, and since his death her heart has been closed up to all the others and especially to me.

Lorenzo How dare you, scoundrel of a knave! Do you not think that I know her, my sister of uniqueness? She has never had another thought in her brain than erotical indulgence. Yes, she loved Andrea, but that he is dead does only mean one thing: that she has turned her love to someone else.

Pedringano I can know nothing about that.

Lorenzo You lie! (*pulls his sword*) My arrant knave, your credit is withdrawn! (*forces him on to the wall with the steel against his throat*) If you don't tell me what you know immediately, you will get paid with interest by cold steel once and for all.

Pedringano To tell the truth, I don't think she loves anyone more than Andrea, if it wasn't for Horatio.

Lorenzo (*surprised*) Horatio?

Pedringano He is the only possible alternative.

Lorenzo The marshal's son Horatio?

Pedringano There could be no one else.

Lorenzo How do you know this, tell me, and you will be more than well rewarded. Fear no punishment from me for telling what you know.

Pedringano I know that she has written letters to him, which I perused on the way.

Lorenzo So it is thus an already established and far gone affair?

Pedringano I know she now prefers Horatio to Balthasar in spite of his nobility as prince.

Balthasar And it is her own words, you scoundrel?

Pedringano I regret to say it is.

Balthasar Horatio! And I considered you my friend!

Lorenzo Watch her closely, Pedringano! Tell me where they meet, report to me what tokens they exchange of love, keep me informed! This must be charted and investigated carefully for plannings and proceedings. Pedringano, serve her well and faithfully as you have always done, but you must keep me up to date on this small tender matter of indelicacy, and you will go free from punishment and prosecution.

Pedringano I have given you in confidence away my mistress' sublime secrets, but if you abuse them, may this sword, that you have threatened me with to my life, be turned against yourself and used by destiny against your own life. (*leaves*)

Balthasar Do you think that we could trust that fool?

Lorenzo He is just a coward. A true lackey cannot lie but is obedient unto death from cowardice alone and fear.

Balthasar We cannot rule Imperia or manipulate her love.

Lorenzo Can't we? Where the word is not sufficient, violence takes over and provides results, but gold is even more efficient, even without violence. You cannot guess how far you can make people prostitute their souls for gold, and Pedringano is

completely sold and lost. He now belongs to us and is as far gone to perdition as my sweet sick sister in her love, which we no doubt will find out how to cure.

Balthasar I can't see how. I see no other way than to put Don Horatio out of business.

Lorenzo That will not be difficult.

Balthasar But I must fear, if we remove him from your sister's heart, that she will only even more remove herself from me.

Lorenzo That remains to be seen. You may decide the matter. Shall we have him liquidated?

Balthasar I now see all things clearly. He alone has caused my entire misfortune. He commenced the war, defeated me and took me prisoner for my humiliation. As if this was not enough he also took away from me my love. All this is not acceptable.

Lorenzo Let us proceed then.

Balthasar He has asked for it himself.

Lorenzo He has himself to blame. We are all set, then.

Balthasar I begin to like you, Don Lorenzo.

Scene 2.

Horatio My love, if now our secret has transcended from an intimate well guarded glow into an open flame, why then do you conceal yourself retiring introverting in avoiding me?

Bel-Imperia I am like a ship but without helm out in the stormy ocean, knowing that the harbour is the only safe and certain destination, and that harbour, I know well, is you yourself, my lover. But I am still lost out in the dark over the depths alone without a helm on the most desolate and turbulent dark ocean finding no way home, no peace and have no pilot to show me the right way in to port.

Pedringano (aside, to Lorenzo and Balthasar) Here are the turtle children, as I promised to present to you.

Lorenzo And taken in the open!

Balthasar Be quiet! Let us hark their cooing.

Horatio Let me show the way across the shallows then, as your own pilot, for I am the only proper shore.

Bel-Imperia Yes, I know well, but still I can't escape the loneliness out in the storm of the dark seas. I see but threats of shipwreck and disaster everywhere and cannot find a single pilot and not even you to trust, from fear of dragging innocents into a tragedy of inevitability.

Balthasar I cannot bear it! How can they together be so intimate and I stand hopelessly outside without a chance?

Lorenzo Be patient, brother. We will soon be rid of him.

Balthasar I see no sign thereof.

Bel-Imperia You are so quiet, dear Horatio.

Horatio If the voice is silent, thinking then will be the louder.

Bel-Imperia What are then your thoughts about?

Horatio About the crises that have been and our happiness that will be.

Balthasar No, about the happiness that has been and the crises now expecting you.

Lorenzo Be quiet!

Bel-Imperia What crises, and what happiness?

Horatio The crises and calamities of war and our happiness of love.

Lorenzo No, your own death and no more happiness at all.

Balthasar Shut up!

Bel-Imperia The crises of the war are over, so forget them, and let us instead be concentrating on our love and happiness. Write dedicated poems to me of your sweetest love, and I will answer them. Give me honeyed kisses of your sweetness, and I will return them with good interest. Let me be your love, and it shall grow in me to be aggrandized to invaluable proportions.

Horatio So let us define the time and place for publishing the banns of our engagement.

Balthasar This transcends all limits for endurance, decency and tolerance.

Lorenzo So let their fire forge the blade and harden it for your most righteous vindication.

Bel-Imperia Let us publish our engagement where we first had our meeting, for the court is dangerous for its public exposition. Let us be engaged in secret so that nothing may disturb or interfere with it before it is a fact. I lost a lover once which was too much. That must not ever be repeated and not even risked.

Lorenzo You have already risked it, and your second lover is already dead.

Balthasar Do not anticipate and celebrate a victory before it has been won.

Horatio You know, my darling, that I will be the last man in the world to dare risk anything for you.

Bel-Imperia What do you mean?

Horatio I mean whatever that may import any risk for you.

Bel-Imperia Yes, that was better.

Balthasar For it was so much worse.

Lorenzo Let their engagement then for our part be the seal of death for that most dashing cavalier. Are we agreed on this?

Balthasar We have no choice.

Lorenzo That's what I mean. *(They join their hands on it while at the same time Bel-Imperia and Horatio meet in a kiss. Pedringano shakes his head in unshakeable misgivings.)*

Scen 3. The court.

King My worthy brother Don Cypriano of Castille, what is your daughter Bel-Imperia's answer to Don Balthasar's proposal?

Cypriano I can have no doubt that she but can accept it. She plays shy and humble but can not at length resist the prince's love, for she well knows, that if she loses her best opportunity, she also will lose her own father's grace and love.

King Then I suggest, your excellence of Portugal, that you admonish urgently your king to fix this marriage for a closer union of our countries. She will have a dowry most generous, and if she will give Balthasar a son, he shall be heir to both the crowns of Spain and Portugal.

Ambassador It is an offer of such advantageous consequences that no one could possibly resist it.

King That is what I mean. So bring our greetings to the king in Lisbon, our brother. When do you think that Don Balthasar will leave?

Ambassador He is well on his way in preparation for his leave.

King Do not forget arranging with the ransom, which his guardian shall have, Horatio, the marshal's son.

Ambassador It will be well arranged.

King Then thanks again, and happy journey.

Ambassador Farewell, all of you, with many thanks for all your generosity and hospitality, with compliments to Bel-Imperia for her beauty. (*bows and leaves*)

King Now, my brother, look well to it, that your daughter does not ditch this marriage. That would be deplorable if she now by capriciousness allowed this possibility to get out of our hands.

Cypriano It is to everybody's interest and the state's that she will humour us and carry through the deal. Or else she will be sorry, which she knows.

King That's good. We trust you to cooperate with your best will.

Cypriano There shouldn't be a problem, brother.

Scene 4. A park with a pavilion

Horatio Once more we meet again, my loveliest Imperia, to renew our vows of love and seal them with a sacred kiss.

Imperia Still I am worried. There is something going on that we cannot control.

Horatio Do you not trust your servant?

Imperia That's why I brought him with me. Pedringano, please stand guard outside the entrance of the park and give me warning instantly if someone importunately should approach who could disturb our peace.

Pedringano Yes, mistress. (*aside*) I'll instantly fetch Don Lorenzo, the right person to eternalize your crazy union. (*leaves*)

Horatio Don't get worried, my beloved.

Imperia The more you ask me not to worry, the more worried I become.

Horatio You will get over it. When love is true, there's nothing that could stop it.

Imperia But when it is at its fullest truth, reality and beauty, it is most endangered.

Horatio Not with me.

Imperia Horatio, I love you. Always do remember that whatever happens.

Horatio I did never doubt it. I will always stand by you whatever happens. And we are in safe hands, for my father has all military power in his hands of competence. So how could anything disturb or happen to us?

Imperia When security is absolute, the danger is most lurking. No assault can be more sudden than the ambush of infernal ill will striking at the heart of happiness.

Horatio Enough, my love, of all your dismal prophecies. Please open up the door for our love uniting by your lips.

Imperia To you all doors to me are always open.
(They kiss. Suddenly Lorenzo, Balthasar, Pedringano and masked assassins rush in.)

Imperia Pedringano! We have been betrayed!

Lorenzo Seal that mouth on that lewd wench! Hang that accursed seducer in the nearest tree! Let it be done at once efficiently!

Horatio Don Balthasar! What did I do to you? What is this kind of a bad joke?

Balthasar It is no joke, my friend. You stand in my way for the ways of power .

Imperia My brother! Do with me whatever you may wish, but spare the innocent Horatio!

Lorenzo Wicked slut, you have gone too far in your self-indulgent self-will. It is now too late.

Pedringano Unfortunately, princess, we have our instructions. *(gags her)*

Horatio You don't know what you are doing.

Lorenzo That's exactly what we know, you rapist of the bride of the deceased! Feel this for some reward! *(stabs him)*

Imperia (gets rid of the gag) Spare him! He is innocent! I am the only guilty one! I loved him and desired him, but he did never violate me or make love to me!

Balthasar But I want to make love to you, and no one turns me down.

Lorenzo It doesn't matter, as he now is dead. If he did not desire or make love to you, my sister, although you invited him, he need not bother any more about it.

Imperia You inhuman murderers and slaughterers!

Lorenzo Shut up that bawling harlot's mouth, for hell's sake, and take her away from here! We'll steal away before we get more credible and inconvenient witnesses. *(Imperia is abducted, gagged. All disappear instantly. Only Horatio's corpse is left, hanged and bloody.)*

(enter Hieronimo)

Hieronimo They wanted me to join them here to learn about some secret. I just hope my son treads carefully, as princesses are never to be trifled with. If ordinary girls sometimes are playful with capricious tricks, then princesses could cause disasters without even being touched by them. But what is this? There seems to have been some irregularity committed here. Here's someone hanging in the tree, cut up

he is as well, as if he had been disembowelled. Such a poor thing of a devil can't be left without a helping hand. (*liberates Horatio and puts him on a bench*) But what is this? What is this deadly joke of outrage and grotesque morbidity that someone mocks me with? Horatio! This must not be you! Tell me you are alive! Tell me this is nought but a nightmarish illusion! This must not be true! Horatio! My own son! How could this happen? This soft hair that I caressed so many hundred thousand times, these noble traits of only honour, honesty and courage, my own boy, no, it's impossible! This cannot have occurred! And here, so close to my own home, in my own garden!



Isabella (entering) What cries and woes of strangeness do I hear, my husband? Why are you not coming in?

Hieronimo Look here, my love, our only son, most brutally and scandalously massacred, outrageously abused and doubly murdered both by hanging and by slaughter, madly executed by inexplicable hatred and insane hysteria! This seems thoroughly absurd and crazy in its almost surrealistic exaggeration.

Isabella And our only son! But who could have committed such a crime? He was among the most appreciated leading popular young men in Spain, and no one had more friends. He had no enemies, and no one wished him harm. He was to everyone, especially to us, the ideal hero.

Hieronimo I cannot understand it. Someone must have gone more than out of his mind. There is no sense, no motive and no method, nothing fits, and everyone could only lose by such a loss. The only thing I know for certain is, that those who did it shall be traced and punished.

Isabella It is beyond comprehension. I am seized and overwhelmed by such an ocean of dark emptiness that I can find no tears to cry for that outraging storm that boils within my heart in a cascade of waterfalls that never can run out but drag me

down into abysmal grief without a bottom, and it only keeps on tearing me and dragging me forever further down, allowing nothing to come out from that black hole of sorrow.

Hieronimo (embracing her and comforting her) My beloved wife, this sorrow without end shall be the sign for our future. I have served my country faithfully throughout my life as marshal incorruptible without a flaw and never a mistake. Shall this then be the gratitude for a lifetime of fidelity, self-sacrifice and risking of my life? No, this is not acceptable! I shall go to the bottom with this worst of felonies in our history, and no one who took part in it shall ever more be safe. I shall fanatically persecute them unto death and to the very heart of hell if necessary! My revenge shall be more inescapable and certain than the holiest plight in christendom!

Isabella And I shall weep over the body of my son until I die. May I shed constant tears of blood over the end result of all the efforts of my love and life in deeper oceans of my grief than what the whole Atlantic fathoms.

Hieronimo At least until you are revenged. Then we can bury our son and proclaim peace over his memory when our duty of revenge has been fulfilled.

Isabella His memory will never give me peace.

Hieronimo Me even less. It shall be like the energy and fuel for the black flame of revenge that never can be quenched.

Isabella My husband, this is far too much.

Hieronimo Indeed it is, as we did not deserve one bit of this injustice, as we were always innocent and honest like our son.

Isabella I shall stand up for him and stand you by in the crusade and quest for vengeance.

Hieronimo That's the spirit. It shall kee us going and alive.

(leaves with Isabella, who at last breaks out in terrible crying. Horatio's body remains lying on the bench in the foreground, as Andrea and Venganza appear.)

Andrea What do you mean by this, my brother? It was Balthasar you were supposed to venge yourself upon and not unreasonably cause the death of my best friend Horatio. And my love, sweet Bel-Imperia, is now imperilled at the mercy of the villains, who will surely find the opportunity to ravish her. All your intrigue has backfired. Have you got everything completely wrong?

Venganza You talk about your harvest although just the seeds have found their ground. Don't worry. Something drastical was needed just to wake up good old Hieronimo. Now he has found himself in a reality which will compel him soon enough to rage and action. And when the King's most loyal servant moves into an angry mood, it's best to keep away, for righteous sacred ire is but the more terrible the more it is well founded; and the more outrageous, the more sacred it is as well.

Act III scene 1. The royal court of Portugal

King of Portugal My son, my loved, unfortunate and only son! One day the pride and hope of all the nation for the future and the leading star to our national success, the next day a dispersed forgotten dream, a sun gone from the sky and leaving only darkness, all our hopes annihilated, crushed to atoms of invisibility and a body whisked away and lost, as if there was some foul political necessity for the denial and the disappearance of a corpse. Now I have nothing left to do in life but to confine myself in loneliness of everlasting grief and sorrow ever getting worse and deeper.

Villuppo Don't blame it all on Alejandro, though. It was perhaps not his fault, and I saw him shortly before battle stand and talk with our prince on very friendly terms. There was no doubt, that they were only best of friends.

Portugal Still the responsibility is Alejandro's, who enticed my son to join the fateful battle, and I have no doubt that it was Alejandro's wish to thus get Balthasar out of the way. My son was good and only thought the best of all, so Alejandro had no difficulty in persuading him and tempting him into the trap of death. Bring in the bloody villain! We shall trifle no more with the criminal conspirer and murderer!

(Some knights bring in Alejandro in chains.)

There is nothing, Alejandro, that can save you any more! My son demands revenge, and I will have no peace for mourning until his betrayer is disposed of!

Alejandro With your leave, your majesty, but there has not been any evidence of that your son is dead. Grant patience any chance for common sense to have a say.

Portugal You only try to trick me. I am to be fooled no longer, and no patience in the world can save you any more! Take him away and torture him and press him for confessions on the burning rack for his intrigue! And burn him on the stake if he persists in lying!

(Alejandro is tied up on the torture instrument.)

Alejandro Villuppo, it is you who have brought me to death, but I will haunt you by my ghost eternally for my revenge!

Villuppo On the contrary, my friend, I was your lawyer of defense.

Alejandro You worm of falsity, who made our liege believe that Balthasar was murdered and by me!

Villuppo You are mistaken. On the contrary, I always claimed that there was never any evidence of any corpse of Balthasar. *(enter Ambassador)*

Ambassador What's this?

Portugal An execution of the cause of my son's death.

Ambassador Desist! He lives!

Portugal Who?

Ambassador Your son!

Portugal My Balthasar? He lives?

Ambassador Indeed he does, and well, in custody in Spain, where he found solace in the princess, and we are engaged with interest in binding both the royal houses close together by their marriage.

Portugal What are these strange utopias? Is then Balthasar not dead?

Ambassador Of course he isn't. He was rescued in the battle by a certain warrior Horatio, who protected Balthasar his enemy by his own shield and made him willingly surrender to him as a prisoner. He's living like a prince in comfort at the court of Spain among the loveliest of princesses.

Portugal Set Alejandro instantly at liberty! (*He is released. The King embraces him fondly.*) My friend, I beg you to forgive me! All the circumstances spoke against you. I regret that I did not believe you and allowed to proceed thus far.

Alejandro It is bitter that you have to prove your innocence in order to avoid a traitor's death by a mistaken execution. No one wished to hear about my innocence only because you stubbornly believed that I was guilty of what hadn't even happened, and without a shred of evidence.

Portugal Yes, but it is all over now. Go home in peace. Now we shall have a banquet for a celebration, for the son we thought was dead has now been proved alive and more alive than ever! My favourite ambassador, tell me some more! What is this match you have in thought? How far have these intriguing plans proceeded? (*takes cordially the ambassador along, and the court follows.*)

Alejandro (the last to remain) Thus they superficially extol while feasting and have already forgotten that they were about to mutilate and execute an innocent. I almost wish that overbearing Balthasar to have been dead.

Scene 2.

Hieronimo Has Hieronimo no right to grieve, since he is a grand of Spain? Should Hieronimo have no right to cry since he is his country's and his monarch's marshal? Has Hieronimo no right to go mad when his only son so obviously has been murdered by the very royal family he has served all his life? Have I no right to grieve as a father for my only son, because I have such a high important position of responsibility? Have I no right to cry out my woe and misery, a more unfathomable bitterness than Lucifer's, because I am in a position? Have I no right... no, I have no right, for a son was all I had, and this only begetted son has been murdered. I have no right to cry, for the one I cry for is now dead, my only son. I have no right of any life any more since my only son has been murdered. Like my wife I am just a shallow shell of emptiness without anything within but bottomless abyssals of the empty dry black tears of oceans of sorrows, like a subterranean lake that never can have any outlet. All I still have left to live for is an overwhelming urge and desperate demand for a revenge, the natural storm of power of which craves resounding justice with more violence and consequence than any legal measure. If the court is behind this, the whole court must be brought to justice, mangled, quartered, hanged and mutilated everyone of them! That is the absolute irrevocable law's command of the law of nature of Hieronimo, more strong and with more power and irresistibility of force than any exploding volcano! For it is the father's law whose son has been

assassinated! – But what is this? (*takes up a letter*) A letter on my way, for me? It must be something confidential. (*opens it*) It's written in red ink. But can this be possible? (*reads*) "Hieronimo, for want of ink this is now written in my blood. I am kept in captivity and isolation by my brother and prince Balthasar, who murdered my beloved and your son Horatio. I implore you to revenge him and myself, who do not fare well in these brutal hands of murderers. Good luck with this necessity and its fulfillment and success, which sadly your misfortunate Imperia now is missing."

The letter is sincere indeed, but what does she mean? What reason did they have to murder him? He and Balthasar were the best of friends, and also Lorenzo had nothing against my son Horatio. This is hardly reasonable, and still this Bel-Imperia is sincere and serious. Or could this be some kind of a trap? Beware, Hieronimo, of intrigues of deceit! There is something in this that you cannot see. Could she have any reason to set me against her brother and prince Balthasar? I cannot know anything about that. But before I proceed I must have clearance in this most incredibly unlikely charge and accusation by the princess. But here is Pedringano, her own servant, just in time, like on demand! Hey, good faithful Pedringano!

Pedringano Marshal Hieronimo!

Hieronimo Where is your lady? Are you not her servant?

Pedringano I know not where she is. But ask her brother, who is here, Lorenzo.

Lorenzo (appearing) What is it, Pedringano? Is anybody asking for me? Hieronimo!

Hieronimo Your faithful servant.

Pedringano He asks for Bel-Imperia.

Lorenzo She is not available.

Hieronimo I hope she isn't ill?

Lorenzo No, she has merely left the city. There was some slight division between her and our father, so he sent her out of town. Can I leave a message?

Hieronimo Not at all, it's still too late, and I regret that she is out of grace.

Lorenzo But maybe I can help? Submit your case to me.

Hieronimo No, it can't be done. I must find other ways. Thanks anyway.

Lorenzo Goodbye, then.

Hieronimo My sorrow cannot be expressed by all my heart, and my thought must not be misinterpreted by any tongue. (*leaves*)

Lorenzo Look, Pedringano, who goes there.

Pedringano Yes, one of your accomplices and hired men.

Lorenzo Do you think he could have divulged the matter?

Pedringano Hardly, since it was so late, and since he was with me most of the time.

Lorenzo Still I regret that he was in on it and with us. Here is gold, if you can make him meet us at the park of San Luigi. Meet him there, strike home into his heart, for he must die.

Pedringano But how could I make him come there?

Lorenzo I will send him there. Just look to it that he does not leave you alive.

Pedringano Well then, I go to arm myself.

Lorenzo Yes, go to it. (*Pedringano leaves.*) You there.

A page Your grace?
Lorenzo Go tell him, your master Serberino, that I wish to meet him eight o'clock sharp behind the small house.
Page Yes, my lord. (*leaves*)
Lorenzo Everything will be arranged. Now to organizing and collecting for the liquidation of all evidence. That Hieronimo all of a sudden asks about my sister means he is investigating, and when someone starts investigating it means that he knows too much already. Therefore I must see to it that Pedringano doesn't babble but gets caught in his own crime. I must have some words with the guard and provide him with some tips.

Scene 3.

Pedringano (aiming with his gun) Stay a moment, and consider for a second, Pedringano. What are you actually doing? You shoot in cold blood your own brother, whom you worked with under the same roof for many years, because your lord gave you some gold to do the deed. Am I then not a hired assassin? What ill has ever Serberino done to you, Pedringano? Nothing! He always showed you kindness and fidelity. But I have no choice, for I am bought to kill him, and the only law is money. In spite of my lord I will be called a coward and get sacked, while he gives someone else some gold to kill poor Serberino in my stead. So I might as well get through with it and murder him, and my lord will stand between me and the law for safe protection. I have nothing to fear and only to be rewarded. (*takes aim*)

(*enter patrolling guards*)

Guard 1 And why should we guard the park more carefully this evening?

Guard 2 I have no idea. Someone must have heard about something or perhaps had some tip of something going on.

Guard 1 I usually smell scoundrels at some distance, and here I feel the stench of far more than only dirty tricks.

2 We had better not go to sleep. If we should fall asleep anyway, we had better do it with our pistols triggered.

1 You said it.

2 Quiet! Someone's coming! (*They retire.*)

Serberino (entering) Here is the place for the encounter. What would they want with me, those high and noble gentlemen? It must be some confidential mission, some secret, probably a message of some delicacy, which they wish me to deliver to some lady. That is usually the case.

Pedringano Here he is, and punctual at that! Shoot then, Pedringano, and be certain not to miss! (*aims*)

Serberino I wonder why the lords please to be late or absent. Still they wanted me explicitly to be exactly punctual. The time so late at evening also is not too well chosen. Everything seems most remarkably improper, odd and inconvenient.

Pedringano I have you, Serberino, now! (*shoots him*)

There he lies, and I have done my job.

(*The guards rush forth.*)

Guard 1 It was a gunshot!

2 And here lies someone dead! Arrest the murderer!

Pedringano No one is arrested here, for I am Pedringano and have licence! (*They fight. The guards bring down Pedringano.*)

Guard 1 My lord, you shouldn't be out at this late hour. Why didn't you stay in bed?

2 And why did you kill this innocent man?

Pedringano He wandered about late and came in my way.

Guard 1 We must take care of you, Sir.

2 We'll bring him directly to Hieronimo.

Pedringano Take me wherever! I have a licence and can well defend myself to anyone! I spite the entire world!

2 Out with him!

1 We had better lock you up. (*They lead him out.*)

Lorenzo (coming out of the shadows in a hooded cloak) One out of the way. One less. But how many are remaining? Never mind. We'll manage them all by careful methodology. Two flies in one blow has made my evening glow. (*retires in the opposite direction*)

Scene 4.

Balthasar What's on, Lorenzo? Already up?

Lorenzo Only to warn you.

Balthasar Has anything happened?

Lorenzo There is something in the air.

Balthasar Like what?

Lorenzo That someone might have informed Hieronimo.

Balthasar Who would do a thing like that and why?

Lorenzo That's more than I know.

Balthasar You are hysterical and have grown anxious. Say, it's not just a bad conscience?

Lorenzo I know that something is coming, and that someone knows too much. Therefore I have taken precautions... But here is my page. What news, my friend?

Page Your grace, Serberino has been found dead.

Lorenzo Who did you say? Serberino? Who used to be my servant?

Page The very man.

Lorenzo And has the murderer been arrested?

Page Yes, they have caught the one who did it.

Lorenzo Who was it?

Page Pedringano.

Balthasar This is too much. Serberino, my most loyal and trusted servant, has been murdered by his own best friend! How is it possible? Had Pedringano had too much, or did he just go crazy?

Page He was sensible enough with all his wits at hand, but very overweening.

Lorenzo Such a crime cannot be tolerated or forgiven. We must immediately demand revenge for your good servant with the king. A murder of this kind is not acceptable.

Balthasar But what was their quarrel? What went into your cursed servant's suddenly demented mind? There never was an argument between them earlier.

Lorenzo Neither I can understand this. But we must have justice! You have my endorsement of that Pedringano must be punished and with death!

Balthasar I shall demand it personally by the king and speed the course of law and justice. Your servant must be held accountable and pay for this atrocious murder on my servant by his life! (*leaves*)

Lorenzo Thus everything arranges by itself. I bestow the conspiracy, and you buy it and efficiently dispose of all the traces, so that no one can find out how it was all contrived. Thus we appear as most impeccable and honourable men while only innocents are sacrificed to make our way. It all ends up accordingly if only you keep quiet about what you know. The only criminal offence is not to keep your mouth shut. (*enter messenger with a letter*) Is that a letter and for me?

Messenger To you, from Pedringano, who has been imprisoned.

Lorenzo So he is safely kept locked up?

Messenger Until he is condemned and hanged.

Lorenzo What does he want of me?

Messenger It's his belief that you could save him.

Lorenzo Is it so indeed? Let's see. (*opens letter*) Tell him, that we received his letter and are now aware of his predicament and will do what we can. Tell that to him for comfort. He will need all solace he can get.

Messenger Yes, Don Lorenzo. (*leaves*)

Lorenzo My page, poor Pedringano will need comfort. Give him my best greetings with this wallet with some gold. There will be more. You are familiar with the prison. See to it that he will have the wallet so that no one else discovers it. Tell him that his case will be tried this very day and that he will have nothing more to fear. His pardon is already written. Show him this document envelope but don't break its seal. Tell him that it contains his pardon. That will make him happy. He must not open it though until the process reaches a successful end. Not until then is the right moment. Have you got it?

Page It's a simple matter. I will instantly deliver.

Lorenzo Look to it that it is carefully delivered with discretion.

(*aside*) So far so good. May it work out well. It only now remains to give the hangman his directions. Then my conscience will find peace and sleep when all that gnawed on it are dead. There's no one who knows my intentions. That I have my will is all that matters.

Page (aside) My lord forbade me to have any look into his confidential document, which only can be interpreted one way, that I must do so. It must be opened anyway, and Pedringano need not ever know about the seal. So, (*opens it*) let's see what is so confidential. (*disappointed*) But here is nothing. That's what I call a most royal joke. So they just send poor Pedringano straight to death and laugh about it! And poor Pedringano! Believing that he has his pardon in his pocket he will laugh and scorn the court and judge and joke about the hangman, as he will be certain of how he will get away with ease, but it will only be the opposite. And I can only stand by him in front of him and say: "Fear nothing, Pedringano, for here is your pardon!" edifying him before his execution with the lies of fickle false dreams of illusions. What a cruel thing is power, as it thus distorts and turns all justice to its opposite unto irrecognizability to the destruction of herself! I am sorry, but I can't cry for you, Pedringano, since you actually went into your own trap. All I can do is to congratulate you for not knowing that you are hopelessly stuck in your own trap. (*leaves*)

Scene 5.

Hieronimo So you slave for the world order superiority, sustain it in its mask of so called right, as if there was the faintest trace of justice in the office of command. The so called right is but an instrument manipulated howsoever by whoever, and woe betide that servant of established right who doesn't follow the commands of superiority! Thus we serve the unpredictability of a strange law and right of a capricious superiority demanding everyone's respect for that illusion but without a chance yourself of any right or even any insight or investigation. Next case! What's on the agenda?

Notary Pedringano, accused of homicide.

Hieronimo Are there any witnesses?

Notary He was caught in the very deed with a smoking gun and proud of the assassination.

Hieronimo That will be an easy case then. Bring on the court, and bring in the prisoner.

Notary Bring in the prisoner! (*Pedringano is brought in in chains, with a letter in his hand.*)

Pedringano That was about time indeed! In prison you are easily forgotten by a careless and indifferent fumbling state of jurisdiction which can't even keep the drains clean of society.

Hieronimo You lousy dog of a premeditating murderer, how dare you preach and lecture the king's state of jurisdiction? Confess instead your infamous premeditated murder!

Pedringano I kicked a dog to hell who was standing in my way. Such are executed constantly by the superior command, for superiority commands its servants to kill

anyone for nothing. You must be a soldier and have some experience yourself, your honour.

Hieronimo Your intolerable arrogance is as contemptible as your contempt of court. So you confess that you in cold blood murdered Serberino without scruples and intentionally?

Pedringano Yes, because I had no choice.

Hieronimo You could have let him live, you villainous conceited scoundrel! That would have been easier for all of us including you! No we must kill you too, because you killed an innocent poor servant, since that is the law.

Pedringano What is the hurry? Take it easy, honourable gentlemen, for I can not be held responsible for this occurrence.

Hieronimo You committed it, and you confessed it. How can you then claim that you are not accountable?

Pedringano The murder was by order of command. I beg you, gentlemen, to read the contents of this letter. Afterwards you may condemn me, if you dare.

Hieronimo (to the notary) What kind of letter is it?

Notary (taking care of Pedringano's letter) It's an open letter to Don Lorenzo, a nephew of the king's, son of Cypriano, duke of Castille. It seems to be some intricate confession.

Hieronimo So let us read it. *(receives and reads it aloud)*

"Sir, it was by your command that I committed that requested murder which I now am being tried and sentenced for to death. If you will not come to my rescue, I must then confess your own and my part in the plot that also noble Balthasar of Portugal participated in, that is the murder of the noble Don Horatio."

Pedringano, you absurd and wicked scoundrel, do you then confess your part in also the assassination of Horatio, who made prince Balthasar his prisoner?

Pedringano It was I, Don Balthasar and his accomplice Serberino, Don Lorenzo and some more. But Don Lorenzo afterwards grew frightened, ordered me to murder Serberino and saw to it that I was caught by witnesses, to have all his own witnesses disposed of.

Hieronimo This will hardly save your neck, poor instrument of criminal conspiracy, but it will surely bring some more up to the scaffold of the executing justice.

Pedringano If I am to die it might be comfortable not to die alone.

Hieronimo Away with him, and clear the court! May justice have its course! Bring him up the scaffold! He is guilty many times over and over! Nothing more can save him.

Pedringano I am satisfied as long as you, if you are just, your honour, see to it that all the others also follow me to hell.

Hieronimo If you'll have any say at all to where you will be sent, bring your case up in front of heaven's gate, for only heaven will be able to accomplish that divine development of justice that you wish for. Take away the prisoner! *(Pedringano is brought out. The court is cleared.)*

So it was true, what Bel-Imperia wrote to me in that letter, and I was grossly mistaken in disbelieving her. But Don Balthasar! He was my son's best friend, and he requested specially to have him for his friend and host in his captivity! It makes no sense. And neither did Lorenzo have anything against my son. How did they turn such wicked and distorted knaves? Here is something still that I don't know of. Let me now go home to my mad wife. We lost our only son, but it was even crueller against me by destiny that my beloved wife should lose her reason, so that now I must endure both my own grief and be her caretaker in her abysmal hell of madness caused by too much strain that darkened and replaced her brains with infinite extreme despair.

Scene 6.

Lorenzo And are you sure that he was absolutely dead?

Page He could impossibly have been more dead.

Lorenzo Then we are safe. Then Bel-Imperia can be released. Look to it that it is well arranged, and see to it that she is sent to me, for I must have a talk with her.

Page Yes, your grace.

Lorenzo Then we can start embarking on our plans. The witnesses have been disposed of, and it is all set for action now, if only my good sister will cooperate.

Balthasar It is indeed time for her presentation, since your father the duke also has been asking about her.

Lorenzo I gave him reasons good enough for her indisposition, which excluded any possibility of doubt or any shadow of suspicion.

Balthasar Everything will be all right if only she comes out into the open.

Lorenzo Do you love her still?

Balthasar Of course.

Lorenzo I ask you only to be careful with her. Mind you, she is still in mourning after her Andrea. Take no risk of venturing the slightest matter to displease her. She must only be well humoured. That's the only possibility for you to reach her heart.

Balthasar As if I didn't know, that's how all women work. They cannot take the slightest criticism but fall for any false and superficial flattery. If you say something true which isn't pleasing, you are worthless as a damned villainous liar. The only truth for women is what pleases them and what they wish to hear. That's why women speak too much while men subjected to their company will have no sense if they do not keep quiet.

Lorenzo With your knowledge and experience you surely will be able to soon have her round your finger. But here she is now. Welcome, dearest sister!

Bel-Imperia Sister? No. You are my enemy, or else you would not have abused your sister so outrageously. I do not know the man who turned his weapons in my company against my love to butcher him and hang him under my own eyes. I do not know the man who locked me up under the pretext that I was demented for nine

days, although you personally represented the supremest form of madness by your violence.

Lorenzo I beg you to control yourself, my dear. All I did was for my family and to your honour. You don't seem to yet have realized that it was only for the best of all and your own good.

Bel-Imperia Scorn me as you like, but don't humiliate me any more. You reason like inquisitors, who burn heretics at the stake for their own good, and torture them for the extortion of confessions of their intercourse with Satan's mythical appearance and garotte them to allow them entry into the beatitude of heaven in spite of their repentance of their self-will and free-thinking to give them free access to the glory of the whiteness of the angels' wings and all the orchestras of only harps.

Lorenzo My sister, keep the inquisition out of this! Our family is far above it, it is only simple people, foreigners, ignobles and all kinds of trash of doubtful innocence that are subjected to the systematic beneficial cleansings, but although we stand above it we must never criticize or question that establishment. You are no witch – as yet.

Bel-Imperia Your defense of my honour has almost totally destroyed it.

Lorenzo You don't seem to understand the seriousness of your position and the situation. You are to be married with the heir of Portugal's immense world empire!

Bel-Imperia Horatio's murderer? (*points at Balthasar*) That one?

Balthasar Patience, princess. I am not as bad as it may seem.

Lorenzo Guard your tongue, my sister. There are only worse alternatives, and all of them are punishments. Remember your imprisonment.

Bel-Imperia You threaten me, your sister?

Balthasar Do not get excited. You are both exaggerating, going to extremes for nothing, understanding nothing, getting it all wrong and making it appear in twisted versions. No family honour is so sacred and untouchable that it will go unscathed if someone goes to far in action for it.

Bel-Imperia And how will you defend your family honour, murderer and pimp?

Lorenzo Remember, Bel-Imperia, you are speaking to a crown prince.

Bel-Imperia No, he is the one who should remember that, not I. It's not my honour dragged in dirt by you it's all about, but your own royal family honour, you worthy scoundrels and deceivers.

Balthasar Don't get me wrong, Imperia, but try to understand me.

Lorenzo No, let me account for how it happened. There I was with our prince and duke, and we discussed the possibility of finally a union of a marriage between Portugal and Spain, between yourself and Balthasar, to once and for all establish an eternal peace and unity, when we discover you in the pavilion with that simple Don Horatio, far beneath your rank! Too well aware of how you scandalized yourself with Don Andrea, also without rank of simple origin, I couldn't help humiliating you in the same way once more under the eyes of noble Balthasar, the duke and all the world! It could not be acceptable when you were to be queen of our future! So we found it necessary to immediately free you from this burden of dishonour.

Balthasar And at the same time we found it safest to deliver you from the suspicion of an intercourse with such a simple man, so we brought you into safety far away from any possibility of human evil and satanic slander.

Lorenzo So it only was for your own good.

Bel-Imperia So why was not our father informed of where I was?

Lorenzo O sister, your unworthy grief and terrible despair for Don Andrea had affected him so deeply that we found it safest also to keep you away from him.

Bel-Imperia Did he not ask for me and wonder where I was?

Lorenzo Yes, and we answered him, that you would soon come back, and here you are, so there is no more worry about that.

Bel-Imperia So you killed my lover and sequestered me in a secluded unknown place all for my best and also for the duke's best and the best of all.

Lorenzo Yes, you can see it that way, even if you put it rather bluntly.

Bel-Imperia Don Balthasar, if I am to be yours I will not answer for the consequences.

Balthasar So you accept?

Bel-Imperia It's not for me to decide on this issue. Everything is settled for the best of all the others. I am just a pawn in your intrigue game to be handled as you please.

Lorenzo That's right, my sister. The main thing is that you don't obstruct us but cooperate and willingly without resistance.

Bel-Imperia We shall see. I am without responsibility.

Lorenzo Balthasar, she has accepted you.

Balthasar I knew it!

Lorenzo All our plans will be fulfilled. Thank you, my sister, for your wisdom.

Bel-Imperia All wisdom in this business is your own. I am just one among the dead fish following the mainstream.

Lorenzo Thanks for that. *(to Balthasar)* Then we can meet the duke and face the Portuguese, since now we have an offer not to be resisted. *(leaves with Balthasar)*

Balthasar Until later, princess. *(kissing her hand and leaving)*

Bel-Imperia I would rather have been kissed by a disgusting slimy toad. Your spider webs are only getting you yourselves into a tangle, gentlemen. I shall prepare myself to watch how you are caught by time in your own snares and then like prisoners of destiny helplessly flounder until you are suffocated in the stench of noisy gases of your poisonous intrigues.

Scene 7.

(Enter 5 Portuguese gentlemen.)

1 Say, my good man, could you maybe show me to the ducal palace?

Hieronimo You have that in front of you.

2 We mean the house in which he lives.

Hieronimo You still have that in front of you. You only need to look ahead.

1 But there are many houses.

2 We are looking for the son, the valiant Don Lorenzo.

Hieronimo You mean Don Lorenzo, son of Don Cypriano?

1 Yes, the very man.

Hieronimo I know him well, for all roads lead to him. Next to you is the road from a bad conscience leading directly into a fearful wood of terror and suspicion, a most dangerously dark and horrifying forest, which is rather perilous to pass. There you will find the deepest melancholy, and if you just follow the road straight it will for sure lead you to death by sheer despair, the fateful rocks of which encircle a deep valley where night rules forever without ever letting any glimpse of sunshine through by any chance. There you will languish easily, if that amuses you, for that familiar valley stinks in general of poisonous evaporations, that could bring down anyone in the black bogs of crime, that never will let anyone go free. And in that valley there's an inn that murderers have built into a temple for their cursed souls, for there's a sulphur fountain in direct touch with hell. If you have found your way there you will find Lorenzo bathing in a sulphur basin in unmitigable anger boiling over, which is kept in flaming constancy and flowing of the blood of all his innocent and slaughtered victims, which in that valley is transformed into black boiling poisoned lead...

1 Ha-Ha! Ha-ha!

Hieronimo Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Yes, wasn't that funny? Ha-ha! Ha-ha! (*leaves*)

2 That was a true madman, or perhaps he only was too old?

1 Come, let's go on to the duke's and find our Don Lorenzo. (*They leave.*)

Hieronimo (returning with rope and dagger) Now I must see the king. There is somewhere a judge to whom you can appeal, if even he holds court in hell, and those judgements of justice cannot be appealed, for he who brings a case to that court can be answered but by sentences of certain death to anyone found guilty. So go to hell, Hieronimo, with your demand of just revenge with all the might and power of that sea of innocents eternally condemned! Lucifer was only number one; all who were sentenced later with him for their just demands of justice, truth and freedom are now storming bitterly around in hell demanding all the world for company in the pitch dark blazing fires, for the whole world is by far more rotten and hopelessly evil than all hell, which in comparison has only innocence and harmlessness to boast of. But be quiet! Here we have the king with all his following.

(*Enter the king with Lorenzo, Cypriano and the ambassador.*)

King Worthiest ambassador, what is the word now from your king? Has he received our message and our gifts?

Hieronimo Justice, majesty, I call for justice!

Lorenzo Marshal, don't you see the king is busy?

Hieronimo Oh, is he indeed?

King Who is calling on us, interfering in our business?

Hieronimo It's not me. Don't let me importune, just passing by.

Ambassador Your majesty, he has indeed received your message and your gifts. And it is with boundless joy that he accepts all its suggestions. He delights in the idea of Bel-Imperia uniting with his son in marriage and is eager to himself be present at the solemn act, confirming the eternal union of our countries by a mutual double crowning ceremony of the future monarchs of our glorious united nations.

King So it is his wish to give his crown to Bel-Imperia and Don Balthasar at the same time?

Ambassador Yes, exactly, and with sincerest joy.

King (to Cypriano) My brother of Castille, what do you think?

Cypriano He pleases thus to honour us in most commendable representation. So we are then to look forward to the highest solemn moment in the history of Spain and Portugal.

King So it seems indeed.

Ambassador In addition our king of Portugal provides as a returning gift the promised ransom to the son of marshal Hieronimo, the valiant Don Horatio, for his graceful hospitality and honourable treatment of our prisoner Don Balthasar, whom he has treated as a guest and brother.

Hieronimo (aside) Who mentions Don Horatio, my son?

King With graceful thanks we will see to it that the ransom will reach Don Horatio presently.

Lorenzo (aside) This is awkward. Balthasar has obviously not informed his kin in Portugal of Don Horatio's death, and neither has the court yet been informed, since it was a most private settlement.

Hieronimo Justice, your majesty! I must have justice!

King Who is that? Is it not old Hieronimo, our marshal?

Hieronimo Justice! Have I no right of justice for my only son, who can't be reached by ransom or by grace!

Lorenzo Hieronimo, your case is out of place here.

Hieronimo Try not to stop me, Don Lorenzo! Give back to me my son Horatio! He can not be ransomed!

King What is this?

Ambassador He is not of sound mind.

Hieronimo If I am to dig through all the earth and break up all the world, I shall get through to my son in the underworld where he is in Elysium and ferry him across the river of the dead back to our world if only to expose his mortal wounds and marks around his neck how he was hanged! Try not to hinder me! My justice shall be carried through, and I will quit my marshal's office to instead devote and sacrifice my life to the right of a lonesome father for his murdered one begotten son!

King Can nothing put a stop to this unpleasant horrible performance?

Hieronimo Don't worry about me, and don't feel embarrassed, I will gently walk out of your way, the court shall not be scandalized. I go my way alone out of your way to search alone all by myself for the right instance and authority, the right judge and justice that will do the job. (*leaves*)

King I never saw my old and faithful marshal so upset. Does anyone know what has happened?

Lorenzo I can explain it. I have heard that his wife lately has gone mad, and he has been affected, taking it to heart too strongly. Therefore he has some touch of hysteria.

King So the wife's hysteria has been passed over to the husband?

Lorenzo That is the one reasonable explanation.

King I hope indeed he will get over it.

Lorenzo He surely will. At the same time the ransom to his son has slightly touched his head.

Ambassador Surely it must be the age, as anyone can have a touch of gaga in advance.

King I think his pain goes deeper. It hurts me to see such a faithful servant suffer. Good Lorenzo, look to it that he receives the entire ransom. What the father gets will also be the son's. Perhaps he thereby will have some encouragement and comfort.

Ambassador He will need it if his wife is really mad.

Lorenzo But if he is incalculable in his instability, wouldn't it be better to relieve him of his heavy duties? Someone more discreet and a more quiet bureaucrat should have the office.

King Then we only would risk turning the stick deeper into his now bleeding wound. Look to it as I ordered. A commission should be presently appointed to look deeper into what has happened, for my hunch is there is something more to this than just a personal misfortune. I just hope, ambassador, that this may not disturb or tarnish our national and boundless happiness.

Ambassador Of course there's nothing that could possibly affect it.

King I hope so. Let us now withdraw into the castle and decide a date for the unification of our nations in a most ideal and happy marriage.

Ambassador We all look forward to it.

King And to the arrival of your king to this historically solemn moment.

Ambassador Absolutely.

King After you, Sir. (*shows the way to the ambassador.*)

Scene 8.

Hieronimo What do I get for exposing my purposes? No, lie still, my harm, so that you may simmer seething in continuous unrest to constantly grow more unendurable until the right moment, when everything explodes in wonderful beatifying vengeance! May no one suspect what I know and covertly plan insidiously, but let it come as a surprise to all the villains in their happiest moment, to see the earth and their foundations shatter under them to give a simple man of the people his justice. May they believe that I am stupid and allow the criminals to get away, they know for certain that I have nothing to put up against their power and nobility; so cover your intentions in a friendly mask of only lenient diplomacy.

Behave with courtesy, bow deep in obsequious humility with your hat in your hand and head uncovered, let no one doubt your foolishly good simplicity, and you shall have your chance one day... But what is this?

Servant Petitions. Here are gathered a number of applicants for help and justice.

Hieronimo So show them in, and we shall see what we can do.

(Three citizens and an old man are showed in.)

Citizen 1 No lawyer wants to take on my case. You are my last hope.

Hieronimo Let's see your papers.

Citizen 2 Signor Corregidor, my issue is of highest importance.

Hieronimo No issue is more important than another. The law applies equally to all with no exception.

Citizen 3 I think that only you can take my obvious complaint against the crown.

Hieronimo Unreasonable taxation?

Citizen 3 What else? But I have no money.

Hieronimo Then happy you who has nothing to lose. And you, old man, what keeps you away from me? Do you also have a petition for me with a warrant for me to carry through your case?

Old man Alas, Don Hieronimo, my delicate case is enough to extort tears from the hardest rocks of granite! Read my petition, and publish it to all the world, and how all human hearts will melt of pity by its knowledge!

Hieronimo So you think you can melt the hardest hearts of the world? Tell me then what your petition is about. What is your case?

Old man Read the petition!

Hieronimo (reads it) Don Basulto appeals and demands justice for his only begotten son, who shamefully was murdered.

Old man Yes, Don Hieronimo, that was my case. Tell me if I have any chance.

Hieronimo It was not your son, Don Basulto, who was murdered, but mine! We are colleagues! Behold your mirror, and I see myself in yours! Take my handkerchief and cry your heart out in it, as I already have drowned it several times, but it can not be filled with tears! Behold the dagger here that my son was murdered by although he was defenseless, pinioned and hanged! Take all the weapons! Share all my limitless griefs and sorrows, take my wallet also, here you have my money, would you also share with me my poor demented wife? Let's share everything, for by our sorrows we are all in the same boat! *(gives out his money)*

Citizen 1 O generous Hieronimo!

Citizen 2 I always said he was a gentleman.

Citizen 3 And more than just a gentleman, for he is kind at heart.

Hieronimo I accept all your cases! Let's go for a crusade together against the overbearing corrupt establishment and crush its sucking tentacles of extortion, cutting limb by limb off its inhuman carcass, until there is no villain left in bullying state! Let's never surrender until we had our just revenge! I will show you how you tear them all asunder, piece by piece, like this! *(tears asunder their petitions)*

Citizen 1 My petition!

Citizen 2 You are tearing up my life's work!

Citizen 3 Don't let us down, for we have nothing left but our prayers!

Hieronimo Do you really think the world could hear your prayers and pay notice to them? No, to the authorities you are but a boring trash annoying them! With your pious and pathetic appeals to be heard at all you will but be scorned by justice, making fun of you and using you to fill their pockets with your money regardless by what means. You might get something done with bribes. If you even cannot bribe you must end up as wrecks of justice. All your cases are as hopeless as mine! Try to save your papers, if you can! Here they go, caught only by the wind! (*throws out the papers and runs out with them. The citizens run after. Only the old man is left.*)

Old man He knows what he is saying and doing, for he has worked with justice all his life and is the expert of it.

Hieronimo (returns) Are you still here alone to face me with my son's admonishing cold eyes, that piercingly appear to charge me with the accusation of not yet having taken on his case? Are you come here to force more fountains out of my demented wife's abysmal tearful rivers from her heart so many times already bled to death? There is no justice in this world for us, old man, or for anyone at that. All we have here are two miserable fathers, you and me, who lost their only sons.

Old man I was not aware that anyone could be more miserable than I.

Hieronimo Now you know. There always are and will be. Misfortune can never reach a maximum but can grow worse forever and constantly surpass itself. To that expansion there are never any limits. But since all the others have deserted me and you alone are left you must be some kind of a ghost. Yes, you are the ghost of my son Horatio, but as such you are much older than myself.

Old man I am no ghost. I only came here with my grief in the belief that you were the last instance of appeal, but I was wrong. Now I know there is no possibility for someone wronged to ever have an appeal accepted.

Hieronimo Exactly! You are learning! And now I know who you are. You are the portrait of my grief, my own double. More than well I recognize myself in you although you are so much older, your harrowed face, the mouth without a smile but rather of the opposite, the sad wrinkles around the eyes, the hollow cheeks, the extreme exhaustion of your emaciated body, your broken crooked carriage of a body that can never rise again in straight position, the half demented lack of expression in your dimmed and muddy eyes, and the thin pale lips that drivelling betray that trembling which will soon give vent to constant muttering of monologues that no one ever will give any ear to, since it's only gaga... Come, my friend, I must present you to my wife. You match each other well. She is like you, a comfortless and lifeless mummy, like a living dead, completely out of reason, mind and sense... We all three now have an eternity to share. Come in, I beg you, into the unblestness of sadness in a temple of eternal darkness, where you never more shall need to be alone. We are all there, we wonderful and privileged, eternal children of the timeless grief, the sorrow without end or bottom, pulling all of us down into the dark hopelessness that

ever will grow only darker, thicker and more hopeless. Meet my wife. There. We are home now.

(He brings him with him inside. Isabella is there pale like a living dead.)

Isabella (like a robot) Welcome, friend. We have much to talk about together. Here we are in safety, for here everyone is dead.

Old man Good madam, I am sorry to see you so sad.

Isabella I am not sad. I am only dead. But it will pass. But you must meet my son, our pride, who even was the pride of all the nation, Don Horatio, our only son. Come with me to join him in the dark. *(brings the old man with her into total darkness)*

Hieronimo I leave you two together. I must back to work. I will be with you soon. Pray, entertain each other in the meantime. *(leaves)*

Scene 9. The court.

King Welcome to Spain, dearest cousin! It's our pride and honour to welcome you with joy to our daughter's wedding with your son tomorrow! If anyone has anything to charge against this, may he now appear or else forever remain silent.

Portugal We have brought with us the entire court intent on celebrating this great wedding feast, and there is not a single one in our contries that could have the slightest second thought about this. Let the feast and union be to all our glory as a fact, and our presence at this double national occasion is perfectly without reservations. I give my crown over to my son ty retire myself into a monastery, as I have wished for all my life, in freedom with my loneliness and books and studies.

King Let's then immediately proceed to get the action going, the formalities and preparations. We have many paragraphs and details to go through together, for a union of two states cannot be carried through without a contract and administrative comprehensive measures.

Portugal I am all at your disposal.

King So let us then enter our cabinet to our proceedings in the next room.

(Exeunt all except Cypriano and Lorenzo.)

Cypriano One moment, Don Lorenzo! May I have a word with you? It is of utmost importance that this enterprise is carried through without delay nor any problem anywhere.

Lorenzo Of course.

Cypriano So it is in the common interest of us all. But there is a rumour that you wronged Hieronimo, our old marshal, that he has some kind of an issue against the crown that has been played down by you. Is that correct?

Lorenzo Who is spreading such old wives' tales?

Cypriano It is told in various directions. I must remind you of how faithfully Hieronimo for three generations has served the crown more constantly than any other and how he on different occasions rendered splendid services to Spain.

Lorenzo There is no need for you to remind me of all that.

Cypriano Finally I must bring your attention to the king's concern about his marshal. If Hieronimo then appear with issues against you to court, how would it not impede the harmony of our wedding! I ask you then to tell me honestly what happened between you and Hieronimo.

Lorenzo Nothing happened. What you have heard is just the gossip of the envious crowd, which always keeps on going and insulting in its slander of the crown and court by fantasies of intrigues and conspiracies.

Cypriano But there is as a rule never smoke without some fire, and rumours that keep circulating always have a source. And I have seen myself how you have rejected and neglected him with his petitions from the king's attention.

Lorenzo You saw yourself how most improperly he importuned. He was beside himself and as hysterical as only very old men get. He should have a convenient pension and thus be removed from further service. I turned the old man away mainly to spare him, for he only made a fool of himself, which you yourself were witness of.

Cypriano So there is nothing in these rumours?

Lorenzo Nothing.

Cypriano On your word of honour?

Lorenzo On my word of honour.

Cypriano I must trust my son, even if I fear he's hiding something from me, that could mean some fearful consequences. It is now my duty to call Hieronimo to court.
(*leaves*)

Lorenzo The deception holds, as long as anyone believes in it, and the instigator of it must believe the lie and stand up for it most of all, although he is the one who best knows the extent of the avalanche-like wildfire of the lie. But there is nothing more to do, as nothing more can stop the avalanche and spreading of the lie. It's just to face the fact that it is on its way in gliding progress with its potent possibility to drag down with it everything and everyone. (*leaves*)

Scene 10.

Balthasar I beseech you, my beloved, to disperse these bleak eyes of melancholy now as we are getting married. You have not the slightest reason any more for sorrow. Let the clouds depart from your sweet face with its invaluable sunshine of your soul's candescent smile, and please forget all that has been. No happiness was built on sorrows of the past.

Imperia You must excuse my shyness, but I don't know you yet. Give me time to mature. No fire of love must be enforced, for then it only will consume. But here I see my father.

Balthasar Let's greet him and treat him well.

Cypriano Welcome, Balthasar, and I see that you already found your way into Bel-Imperia's heart and intimacy.

Balthasar We must get acquainted before our wedding.

Cypriano Daughter, cheer up and try to show some cheer and courteous obligation, for the times are not the same as when your Andrea was alive. Here you have a better suitor, smarter and more cultivated, with whom you could find some stable happiness in contrary to Andrea.

Imperia Alas, my father, don't remind me of Andrea.

Cypriano No, I admit that it was clumsy. Pray forgive me. It is long since now already since he died. – But here is Hieronimo, whom I have called to court. I must have some small talk with him.

Hieronimo (enters) Where is the duke?

Servant He is here.

Hieronimo (aside) What are they up to now? They certainly have new machinations going on. Just keep quiet, Hieronimo, and listen only without talking more than what is necessary.

Cypriano Welcome, good Hieronimo.

Balthasar Welcome indeed, Hieronimo.

Lorenzo (who has entered) Thus I greet you similarly.

Hieronimo I thank you for my Horatio.

Cypriano That was the reason why I called you here.

Hieronimo Then I thank you and will leave, if there is nothing more to say. (*wants to leave*)

Cypriano Stay, Hieronimo! I haven't even started! Call him back immediately, my son.

Lorenzo (stops Hieronimo) My father wishes to speak with you.

Hieronimo Yes, he did. I thought that he had finished.

Lorenzo (aside) I wish he had!

Hieronimo I am at your command, Sir.

Cypriano There has been word that you have some complaint and issue with the crown which hasn't been appropriately handled. Is that correct?

Hieronimo Is it so unusual that such occurrences take place, lord Cypriano?

Cypriano I hope indeed that you have no complaint and cause against my son Lorenzo, since that would not be acceptable, since your reputation is the most impeccable in our court and all respect you for your long and spotless service. Therefore I would like to hear from your own mouth if you have any issue with him.

Hieronimo Against your son Lorenzo? This infallible and noble grand of Spain? (*pulls his sword*) Who dares to venture anything against him? Show me those delinquents, and I will make a clean sweep among them in the name of honour! Let him meet me privately between four eyes and tell me what he might have against Lorenzo! Such infamous reports can only have been fabricated by my personal enemies, who from only biased prejudice could cultivate a personal fanatic hatred against him! Would I then be suspected of having any complaint against him, who ever loved my son so truly and sincerely? They were the very best of friends! I am sorry and regret that such a slander against him has taken place.

Lorenzo Noble Hieronimo, I know that I did never give you any slightest reason for complaint.

Hieronimo That's what I mean.

Cypriano So that is settled, then. Welcome, faithful Hieronimo, to my palace, and accept it as your home! And you are hereby invited to participate in the most solemn celebration of the wedding between Balthasar and Bel-Imperia, between Portugal and Spain this time tomorrow. Demonstrate that there are no hard feelings between you, my son and Balthasar by cordially embracing them and giving them each one a kiss of peace.

Hieronimo By all means, excellency, I will gladly love the entire world and give it my most peaceful generous embrace, especially you two, Lorenzo and Don Balthasar, (*embracing them and kissing them with fervour*) so that it will be obvious that we are the best of friends, like you with my Horatio. Or else no one knows what people and the world may think.

Balthasar I thank you for your friendship, Hieronimo.

Lorenzo I hope thereby that possible controversies and differences in the past may be forgotten.

Hieronimo It would be shameful if they were not.

Cypriano Come, my good Hieronimo! Today you shall be our guest of honour at our court and in my house!

Hieronimo I am yours humbly to command. (*aside*) Who caresses smoothing hairs with only flattery has already betrayed you or will do so.

(*They leave.*)

Andrea Awake, Venganza! This is going all to hell!

Venganza What is the matter, poor young man? Is there a fire?

Andrea You are sleeping on your guard, Venganza! Now Hieronimo has joined Lorenzo and appears to swallow and accept the marriage between Balthasar and my Imperia without any second thoughts at all!

Venganza You are panicking for nothing. It is only subtle threads of mechanisms of fate that now are being woven carefully together. Take it easy. What did I tell you about patience?

Andrea But this harmony will ruin utterly our plans!

Venganza Have they no right to? Let them try. Let them keep on as long as they imagine to have some success. They will get over it. They think they win and will collect the gains with gaiety for all the harm they've done but only to lose everything in the grand slam of destiny, which is life's only victor.

Andrea You mean death?

Venganza What else?

Andrea But I cannot bear to see Imperia becoming someone else's wife.

Venganza Would you have preferred her grieving for you all her life in widow's virgin veils and slowly waste away before her time like any withered nun and mummy? Give her a break. It's only momentarily. You will see that it will pass.

Andrea I will be satisfied if I may see the couple's wedding party getting drowned in floods of blood in their own bridal bed.

Venganza It happens often, but in this case I think chances are better than ever. Just be patient. Even the most lasting period of sunshine will infallibly be interrupted by the most unwelcome storm and rains.

Andrea I must calm down then and try to even more collect my patience.

Venganza That is all we dead and buried ghosts can do.

Act IV scene 1.

Imperia Hieronimo, you amaze me. They assassinate your son in the most beastly fashion, and you pardon them and bless them and cooperate with them. I cannot figure it. Has something happened to your brain?

Hieronimo Don't worry, Bel-Imperia. I am just making way for planning my revenge as perfectly as possible. No one will end up in a trap unless there is a bait.

Imperia So you are just pretending?

Hieronimo No, I would not call it that. I would rather call it falling in and finding out a character, to naturally find your part in a role play and act a figure in a theatre.

Imperia Was it like that from the beginning?

Hieronimo I confess, Imperia, that I doubted your primary information. I could not believe it could be true but rather thought it was a trap, which I now must apologise for. When eventually one servant after the other was disposed of I realized it could be true, and then my theatre was introduced. But I must play my part now to the end, and I must ask you also to play yours, for your part might still be the most important.

Imperia Tell me how to act and play, direct and execute, and it will be my pleasure to perform it well.

Hieronimo The plan is almost ready. But here we have now two more of the main parts.(*enter Lorenzo and Balthasar.*)

Balthasar What do I see, Hieronimo? On intimate terms with Bel-Imperia?

Hieronimo Who does not love her? But, my prince, she loves not me, for you have all her heart.

Lorenzo Of course. How excellent that you are here, old chap, for we shall need some help from you.

Hieronimo Tell me.

Lorenzo The king wants some kind of an entertainment here at court for the occasion with so many noble guests. You are experienced as a poet and know something about how to stage a play. You almost are the poet laureate at court, for there is no one else.

Hieronimo I see. What do you wish me then to do?

Balthasar My father's highest wish is a real play, of such a kind that they are playing now all over Europe, with intrigue and passion, love and duels and dramatic complications.

Hieronimo Isn't there enough of that in all reality?

Balthasar Yes, but there you are yourself engaged. The advantage of observing it on stage is that you then have some detachment to the plot. You need not feel concerned yourself.

Hieronimo A play on stage will need some actors. I know something gorgeous that could fit your purpose well.

Lorenzo What play is that?

Hieronimo The tragedy of Soliman who loved Perseda.

Balthasar That sounds romantic and exotic well enough, the very kind of subject that for sure would please my father.

Hieronimo It has three main parts: the lover, the beloved, and her husband. Those parts are just like made for you, Lorenzo, Balthasar and Bel-Imperia.

Lorenzo So we should act our play ourselves?

Balthasar Why not? I acted for my father several times in Lisbon in most fitting parts.

Bel-Imperia A romantic play could always be enjoyable to share and act in.

Lorenzo But can you stage a play, Hieronimo? It needs a lot of study, preparation and instruction.

Hieronimo Are you joking? Everything is almost ready. This play was already written many years ago when I worked in Toledo with a theatre almost every day. I know the methods of the craft. Here are your parts. (*gives them manuscripts*)

Lorenzo Tell me more about the plot.

Hieronimo It's actually a true and real story. It was a knight of Rhodes who married the Italian beauty Perseda, who gave every man a crush on her. One who became completely potty about her was sultan Soliman, who was invited as a guest of honour to the wedding. He could not get out of his unhappy crush on her and then initiated a close friend in his most painful and embarrassing dilemma, who offers to efficiently remove the knight from being in the way, so that the sultan gets Perseda. But she then acquires such a hatred and abomination of the murderer, that she in wedlock takes his life in bed. And then she kills herself to escape punishment.

Lorenzo But that is absolutely wonderful!

Balthasar Who plays which part?

Hieronimo It's in your manuscripts. Lorenzo is the knight of Rhodes, the sultan is for Balthasar, and Bel-Imperia is Perseda.

Lorenzo And who plays the friend, who kills me?

Hieronimo That's for me to do.

Balthasar How does he end?

Hieronimo He hangs himself from grief for what he has accomplished.

Lorenzo It is on my honour an accomplished tragedy, – but wouldn't it be better with a comedy?

Hieronimo A comedy is just a superficial trash of entertainment, raising small and passing interest, bad attention, yawnings and disturbing derogatory and silly comments. Comedies are never taken seriously and are regarded condescendingly as something base. A tragedy is on the other hand a strong experience evoking feelings and becomes a lasting memory. It puts life to the test and is a thought-provoking trial, mirroring the world as in a nutshell.

Balthasar Yes, I prefer a mighty tragedy, and so does certainly the king my father also.

Lorenzo That settles it, and we have already the material.

Imperia It is not even difficult.

Hieronimo Then we are agreed. If we rehearse this evening, everything will work on the occasion.

Balthasar We are lucky to have found a poet among us.

Lorenzo Yes. But Hieronimo is known for never having failed in finding the solution to a problem.

Imperia Every court has its factotum, some magician who can manage everything and make it work.

Hieronimo I am obliged to you and to the court in humble service, gentlemen. (*bows*)

Lorenzo Good for us that he is humble.

Balthasar Then let's go to our studies for our parts! Come, Bel-Imperia!

Lorenzo See you again this evening, Hieronimo. (*they leave*)

Hieronimo So shall we see a presentation of the fall of Babylon again on stage in a most bloody tragedy, and woe betide me if I fail in the direction! (*leaves*)

Scene 2. The garden.

Isabella Here is where they killed my son, those clever lads. In this green innocently but sincerely quiet tree they hanged Horatio, in this very branch, and struck the dagger down below the belt, like this, (*demonstrates with her dagger,*) with his hands tied behind him, so that he could not defend himself. Where did that evil come from? Who put such a sick inhuman and disgusting worm into the minds of men to make them sometimes feel obliged to execute most hideous murders without motivation, as if they were programmed, operating in their sleep, or as if something alien, subconscious and invisible, perhaps some ghost or demon, urged them to such meaningless dishonourable deeds? Was it Andrea, Bel-Imperia's lover, lost in battle, who turned on that jealousy against Horatio, forcing Don Lorenzo and Don Balthasar to execute my son? Can spirits of the dead have such an influence and power? I must doubt it. And my husband is now equally possessed with vengefulness, so that he plans to murder the entire mob. I don't want to continue any longer. Let me die here like my son. Let me suffer like Horatio, so that I may join him on the other side to motherly and tenderly there keep him company. I have been longing there all since he died and hardly thought of anything else. So take me, sweet and quiet virgin

tree, and let my silence from now on be as eternal as your own in joining your perpetual peace in blissful innocence. (*hangs herself in the tree*)

Hieronimo (*from afar*) Isabella! Isabella! (*appears and discovers her*) No! Not you as well!

Isabella Follow me, Hieronimo! I will await you on the other side. (*thrusts her dagger with a last effort into her womb and dies.*)

Hieronimo No, you mustn't do like that! Spare me! (*cuts her down*) Too late. That dagger found her way too straight into her heart to give it any chance of healing and not breaking. It has broken slowly within you all since Horatio died, but now the limits of its pain had long since been transgressed. You could not wait for even further pain. Thus am I left alone, but there is still a way for me to go. You mustn't leave until you have fulfilled all duties. I will have my vengeance for both you and our son, and I will not be free until it all has been accomplished.

(sits down wagging and whining with the body)

Andrea It's only getting worse all of the time, your strategy is harvesting more innocents each day, so how can you explain this and defend it?

Venganza It was you whom she accused for the manipulation of prince Balthasar and that crook Lorenzo. Were you behind their unconscious acts?

Andrea On the contrary. Horatio was my friend. I only wished to reach his murderer Don Balthasar. But for all the corpses harvested already and of only innocents you seem to me to bear responsibility.

Venganza Do not evade your blame.

Andrea Who is evading it but you?

Venganza Let's have no argument about it. The last word is still with Hieronimo. He still has an entire play in his back pocket to perform.

Andrea It probably will end up with another load of murdered innocents or suicides by mistake.

Venganza You are too pessimistic. I have still good hope for some kind of a fair deal of a settlement of justice. Just be patient.

Andrea Yes, until all innocents are lying dead.

Venganza Don't jump to pessimistic premature conclusions. Just you wait.

Act V scene 1.

(Hieronimo opens the scene by thumping the floor behind the curtain, in the usual way, whereafter he enters in front of it.)

Hieronimo Welcome, honoured audience of ladies and gentlemen! I hope you will not be bored by our performance, which will display a most unique staging of a drama from real life: Soliman Pascha's most misfortunate love of the beautiful Italian Perseda, to whose wedding with the knight Sir Erasto of Rhodes he was invited. Be welcome to applause, but you are also most welcome to tears, for I warrant you, that this tragedy could have moved a heart of granite to tears. Raise the curtain! (*The curtain is raised.*)

Cypriano What now, Hieronimo? You alone on the stage? Where are your players?

Hieronimo We haven't started yet. I am just checking that everything is working as it should. We owe that to the playwrights, who made such a bother with meticulous instructions. May I ask you to present the king with a copy of the entire play, so that he can follow and understand what is happening to prevent his being shocked by the realistic details?

Cypriano How considerate of you, Hieronimo. The king will surely appreciate that. Then he can in peace and calm prepare himself for all the worst in advance and need not fear unpleasant surprises.

Hieronimo That exactly was my intention. May I in addition ask you of a favour?

Cypriano Of course.

Hieronimo When the court has passed the gallery, could you then throw down the key to me?

Cypriano A trifle. (*leaves*)

Hieronimo Are you ready, Balthasar? An armchair with a cushion for the king!

Balthasar (*provides an armchair with cushion*) Here is the king's armchair.

Hieronimo Splendid! Our scene is Rhodes. Hang up the sign! But what now? What's the matter with your beard?

Balthasar I am on my way. I only had time enough for half the beard.

Hieronimo Then make it whole before the performance starts. (*Balthasar leaves.*)

We can have no trickery tonight. Everything must work absolutely perfectly, or else we will have no applause. Join me now, Horatio and Isabella, for you, although invisible, are the leading characters of the evening. But when the time comes I will enter you. Now to the most important details behind the curtain. (*disappears*)

King (*has entered with his court and taken their seats*) Now, my brother Portugal, we shall be entertained with a fateful drama about the sultan Soliman and his famous but unfortunate love affair. I have the drama here, a splendid play, which now will be performed by your son and my nephew Don Lorenzo together with Bel-Imperia, his sister, our bride to be tomorrow.

Portugal We are looking forward to it indeed. An evening entertainment is never wrong.

King It's our marshal and factotum Hieronimo who has collected a special company for us today, and he will act a part himself.

Portugal So we shall see him on stage?

King Here is the entire story, if you want to learn the plot and cheat by reading the last page before the play begins.

Portugal There is no time for that. The play is about to begin.

Cypriano Here is now our prologue already.

Andrea (*being seen with Venganza and Isabella*) You here, Madame?

Isabella I took leave. This is something we must not miss.

Venganza Just wait for the finale.

Hieronimo (appearing) This play is written in various languages, in French and Greek, in Spanish, Hebrew and Latin and has also been translated into English and Italian, but here we shall present it in the only language you will understand.

King For that we are most grateful, Hieronimo. *(to Portugal and Cypriano)* Not all are so considerate to unschooled public and their ignorance.

Cypriano You have stretched our expectations to the point of breaking by this fortunate idea of an evening entertainment.

Hieronimo You shall not be disappointed. Are you ready, actors? Let the play begin! *(The scene on stage is Rhodes with the sultan (Balthasar), his pasha (Hieronimo) and Perseda (Bel-Imperia)).*

Balthasar That we succeeded in acquiring and conquering Rhodes, which now is Turkish actually, we owe our holy prophet Mahomet all praise and honour, thanks and glory, but the loveliest reward of Rhodes would be the beautiful Perseda, the loveliest lady in the world!

King Observe how Balthasar your son engages wholly in his part as lover of some magnitude! He plays the sultan Soliman and ardently explains his storming passion well.

Portugal No doubt his Bel-Imperia already taught him something about that.

Cypriano Yes, he thinks of no one else ever again.

Hieronimo And what more do you wish of this world's riches?

Balthasar Only the beautiful Perseda herself, whom I love more than all the world. But she is married to Erasto, my own foster brother and best friend, the noblest knight on Rhodes. *(enter Lorenzo)*

King Here he comes, your own son, Cypriano, but what part was he supposed to play?

Imperia Welcome, noble husband, my Erasto!

Lorenzo What does it matter that all Rhodes is lost, if only I have you still with me, loveliest Perseda! You are more than all the world!

Balthasar Alas, my pasha, here is the dilemma: whom I love the most is married to the one I honour most.

Hieronimo There are other knights of Rhodes. He is far from indispensable. Get rid of him and make Perseda your own property.

Balthasar Erasto is my friend, and she will never separate from him.

Hieronimo Don't let Erasto live to be a burden and a pain to sultan Soliman.

Balthasar I hold him dear and high in honour.

Hieronimo Think of him for what he is: a rival in your way. That should make him worthless.

Balthasar It's against my conscience thus to act against my heart. Is there no other way?

Hieronimo Of course there is. There always is. – Noblest Erasto, my lord and sultan Soliman salutes you with the best wishes of good health and welfare and a greeting, which you must accept at once, for he will only send it once. *(murders him with a dagger just like he murdered Horatio.)*

Portugal Very real to life.

Bel-Imperia Woe is me! What's this? Behold, o mighty sultan, how my husband, your most noble knight Erasto, has been murdered here!

King Very well played, with convincingly expressive realism.

Cypriano Yes, you could suspect they were professionals.

Hieronimo Do not grieve, o fairest princess! Sultan Soliman remains and is expecting you.

Imperia What do you mean?

Balthasar Behold and welcome, my beloved, in my open arms! All my life is waiting for you! The sincerity of your deep sorrow only makes you more desirable and beautiful!

Imperia What do you mean, false tyrant? Did you murder my beloved husband with the motive to replace him and take care of me? Do you then think that you are worth more than his shadow? You aren't even worth your own! – If you are capable of killing for your love, I must subordinate myself to such convincing demonstration of an overwhelming argument of violence. So take me then into your bed as your own love, invincible victorious and indomitable sultan, but there is a price for such a sacrifice, which the victim has a right to claim. (*feigns to meet him in an embrace but cuts him down with a dagger, just like Lorenzo struck Horatio.*) That makes us even. Let me now pay also my debt for my crime and crown my sorrows with a final liberation and release! (*kills herself with the bloody dagger*)

Portugal What great play-acting! What convincing passions! Bravo! Hieronimo, this excellent performance has been executed wholly with outstanding art!

Hieronimo But it isn't over yet.

King But everyone is dead.

Hieronimo That's what I mean. This was a real performance executed by myself and Bel-Imperia. Now they are all dead, except for one, who still has something to enact. (*disappears behind the curtain*)

Portugal What does he mean?

Cypriano I begin to fear a worse and greater show than what we paid for.

Hieronimo (returns with Horatio's body) Here he is, my Horatio, the finale of my play! He loved Imperia, who answered his love by returning it as sincerely as he loved her. But sultan Soliman was seized by an imperative desire for Imperia, and he was a better match for her. That's why Lorenzo butchered this my only son, this lover and this innocence, Don Balthasar's protector, host and friend, whom Balthasar enthusiastically shared in sacrificing, not only him, but also my good wife, his mother, willingly went into death for his sake since she couldn't bear her sorrow which was growing worse for every day, just like my own! There is no human endurance that can continue grieving, crying, sorrowing and pining in despair in constantly increasing agony forever. Now we are revenged. Imperia as the hero of the tragedy struck down the man who caused his friend's and benefactor's death, Horatio, whom Imperia loved too well. I killed myself Lorenzo, who was my son's direct murderer, in the character of the advising sultan's friend, the pasha. As you

notice, normally after the end of a performance, all the corpses of the tragedy rise to their feet to be applauded when it all is past and done with, but that's not the case this time. They all lie still, for they are all quite dead, except myself, who now takes leave in fulfilling my act by following my wife's and son's course into death. (*escapes*)

King (rising) Stop him!

Cypriano Close all doors!

Portugal This cannot happen! This cannot be true! A play displaying murder in the open! This was not a theatre performance! This was a display of flagrant murders and real suicides!

King I regret this shocking scandal, brother, but perhaps there is still hope that everything was just a play.

Cypriano My children! What kind of a deadly play have you been venturing into?

Portugal So I came here on a fatiguing journey looking forward to my son's release and wedding, but was entertained instead by having to behold how he was killed in public! I can only call it the most unacceptable infamous and grotesque deceit! (*enter guards and soldiers*)

King Have you arrested Hieronimo?

Soldier He got away. When we caught up with him he was already dead.

King What a shameful theatre performance of an overwhelming harvest of too many corpses, finding Portugal and Spain now both without succession!

Cypriano Alas, I warned my son, but he was too fanatic for his reason!

Portugal What can I do but travel home with my son's body to spend the rest of my life in burying him and my own life in sorrow.

King There is no expression for our own immeasurable grief.

Portugal Grieve for Spain, and I will grieve for Portugal.

Cypriano It is too much! I cannot bear it! Both my children!

Venganza Thus it all comes to an end in weeping and despair with gnashing teeth. Are you content now, Isabella? Are you now avenged, Andrea?

Andrea You did it too well. I wished no harm to come to Bel-Imperia. She could have been given licence to live on.

Venganza With her unfathomable sorrow? She belongs to us. Here she comes now with some others.

Imperia May I now at last embrace Andrea, finding him again?

Andrea My love! Here we meet now where we never can be happy!

Imperia There is another life.

Hieronimo (enters with Isabella) How did you like the play?

Venganza Those who survived it were not happy.

Hieronimo That was neither the intention.

Horatio The happy ones are all the dead.

Imperia Dearest Horatio! (*embraces him*)

Horatio Yes, here I am, but you belong to your Andrea, as you always did, and I should not have importuned into the void that you had after him.

Imperia But I invited you. And here I now can freely love you both.

Hieronimo Thus is the family all gathered and united. Now, don't object to this most bloody play, for it was not just theatre. These things happen every day, and this was only something of a glimpse and moment of reality.

Horatio No one is more dangerous to execute as someone innocent, for he shall not be quiet after death.

Andrea You had your play, Venganza. We are satisfied and are now ready to go home.

Venganza Just wait. There will be more. This was only the beginning.

(Exeunt.)

The End.

*(Virhamn 17.6.2002,
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