

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A wood on the outskirts of Valencia, beside the city's famous madhouse.

FLORIANO: Valerio, I'm over here.

VALERIO: I came as quickly as I could,
as soon as your message arrived.

FLORIANO: It took me four days to get here,
riding hard from Zaragoza,
with the devil himself behind me.

VALERIO: Your face is the colour of death.

FLORIANO: There was no one else I could trust...
you're the only friend I've got left.

VALERIO: Tell me for God's sake what you've done.

FLORIANO: I...

VALERIO: What?

FLORIANO: I...

VALERIO: You what?

FLORIANO: I... ah... killed...

VALERIO: Holy God in heaven! Murdered?
You mean you've murdered someone? Who?

FLORIANO: A man... are you sure we're alone?

VALERIO: Positive. Tell me, who was it?

FLORIANO: A man who'd've destroyed me if...

VALERIO: Floriano, stand still, will you,
there's not a soul for miles around,
except the crazed creatures in there.

FLORIANO: Try and put yourself in my place,
every rustle, every murmur...

VALERIO: Calm down and tell me who it was.

FLORIANO: They'll be scouring the whole country,
I can't even trust my own shadow.

VALERIO: You're in a worse state than your victim...
you're a mess of nerves.

FLORIANO: I panicked.
I stole a horse and we bolted
from Zaragoza to Valencia,
down lonely country tracks and lanes,
begging bread from the odd goatherd,
though I've been hungry for four days.
That's what happened. In a nutshell.

VALERIO: Let's see if we can crack the nut.
Who was it?

FLORIANO: If I'm seen, I'm dead.

VALERIO: Some gentleman? No... not a priest?

FLORIANO: In God's name, I swear I don't know.

VALERIO: Then, my friend, you are dead indeed,
for if you refuse to trust me
and keep on playing foolish games...

FLORIANO: All right, I'll tell you who it was...
He was a nobleman... a prince,
a sort of prince.

VALERIO: What sort of prince?

FLORIANO: Prince Reinerio...

VALERIO: Reinerio! He's...

FLORIANO: I know... tenth in line to the throne.
I've had four days to work it out.

VALERIO: They'll hunt you to the ends of the earth,
like hounds close down a fox.

FLORIANO: Thank you.
I knew I could rely on you.

VALERIO: God knows, if I could give my life
for yours, then you'd be a free man.
If I could bring him back to life
with the love that I have for you...
but your sin is against God and man.
Though danger can sharpen the wits
and invention may save you yet.
We must think. (*Silence.*) How did it happen?
How did you get past all those guards?

FLORIANO: Let's get one thing clear – I killed him.
I did not assassinate him!
It was bad luck, sheer misfortune
that brought him and me face to face
in the house of a certain lady...
Celia... she's got the loveliest eyes...

VALERIO: More blood's been spilt for the sake of love
than in all man's battles and wars.

FLORIANO: Believe me, I'd no taste for blood...
I just wanted to get away,
but he flew into a fury
and would listen to no reason.
There were two guards waiting outside
and he set them on me like dogs.
I ran into a narrow lane
and he came thundering after me.
I knew that I was about to die
and with the courage of the dead
I drew my sword and turned round.
His guards had no room to get past,
and I ran my sword through his arm,
and plunged it clean into his heart.
He fell like an ox at slaughter.
