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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
21 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.
THE DEAD CITY

By GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

Translated by
ARTHUR SYMONS

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MDCCCC
TO

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

I DEDICATE THIS TRANSLATION, BEGUN AT ARLES AND
FINISHED AT TOLEDO, THE TWO DEAD CITIES
WHICH I LOVE MOST IN EUROPE

A S

TOLEDO, April 3, 1899
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ALESSANDRO
LEONARDO
ANNA
BIANCA MARIA
THE NURSE

In "thirsty" Argos, near the ruins of Mycenae,
"rich in gold."
THE DEAD CITY

THE FIRST ACT

A large and luminous room, opening on a pillared loggia facing the ancient city of the Pelopidae. The loggia is raised from the level of the room by five stone steps arranged in the form of a truncated pyramid, as before the vestibule of a temple. Two Doric columns support the architrave. In the distance is seen the Acropolis with its venerable Cyclopean walls, broken by the Gate of the Lions. On each side of the room are doorways leading to the inner rooms and the stairs. A large table is covered with papers, books, statuettes, and vases. All along the sides of the room, in the free spaces, are models of statues, of bas-reliefs, of inscriptions, of fragments of sculpture: records of a remote
existence, remains of a beauty which has passed away. The arrangement of all these white things gives the room a clear and rigid, almost a sepulchral, aspect, in the immobility of the morning light.

SCENE I.

Anna, sitting on the highest step of the loggia stairs, with her head against one of the columns, listens silently to Bianca Maria, who reads aloud. The Nurse sits on a lower step, at the feet of the listener, in an inert attitude, like a patient slave. Bianca Maria stands, leaning against another column, dressed in a kind of tunic, simple and harmonious as a peplum. Holding in her hands an open book, the "Antigone" of Sophocles, she reads in a slow and grave voice, which trembles from time to time with an undefined tremor which does not escape the listener. More and more her attention is aroused by these signs of disquietude and anxiety.

Bianca Maria.

[Reading.] "Eros invincible,
Eros that ravishest the spoils of men,
That keepest watch upon the maiden's cheek,
Roaming the seas and among pastoral folk!
Thee none of the immortals can escape,
And none of mortals living but a day,
And he who finds thee presently goes mad.
Thou turnest just men's thoughts to thoughts of
wrong,
And kinsman against kinsman doth set up.
The clear light of a lovely woman's eyes
Rules, and outmasters the eternal laws.
Unconquerable Aphrodite mocks at all.
And I too am now hurried beyond the bounds,
Nor can I stay the sources of my tears,
Seeing toward the bride-bed that gives rest to all
Advance Antigone.

"Antigone. See me, O citizens of my fatherland,
Set forth on my last way, and look my last
Upon the sunlight I shall see no more.
For Hades, that gives rest to all, now leads
Me living to the shores of Acheron,
Unwedded; nor shall any sing for me
The bride-song, being bride of Acheron."

[The reader stops short, as if overcome. The book
trembles in her hands.

ANNA.

Are you tired of reading, Bianca Maria?
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BIANCA MARIA.

Perhaps a little tired. This spring, as it dies now, is so burning, that it leaves one wearied and almost out of breath, like the very summer. Do you not feel it too, Anna?

ANNA.

Have you shut the book?

BIANCA MARIA.

I have shut it. [A pause.

ANNA.

Is there a great deal of light in the room?

BIANCA MARIA.

Yes, a great deal.

ANNA.

Is the sun on the loggia?

BIANCA MARIA.

It is coming down the pillars, it is just going to touch your neck.

ANNA.

[Raising her hand to touch the pillar.] Ah, I feel it. How warm the stone is! It seems to me as if I am touching a living thing. Are you in the sun, Bianca
Maria? Once, when I looked straight at the sunlight with my dead eyes, keeping the eyelids open, I saw a kind of rosy vapour, hardly visible, or from time to time a scintillation like that which is struck out of flints, almost painful. Now, nothing at all; perfect darkness.

Bianca Maria.

And yet your eyes are always spotless and beautiful, Anna; and in the morning they are full of freshness, as if sleep for them had been dew.

Anna.

[Covering her eyes with both hands, and resting her elbows on her knees.] Ah! the waking up, every morning, how horrible! Almost all night I dream that I see, dream that sight has come miraculously into my eyes. And then to wake up in darkness, always in obscurity. If I told you the worst misery I have, Bianca Maria! Almost all the things I remember are the things I saw once, in the days when there was light: I remember their forms, their colours, their minutest details; and the whole outline of them rises before me in the obscurity if I merely touch them with my hand. But of myself I have only a confused recollection, as of a dead person. A great shadow has fallen over my own image; time has dimmed it, as it
dims in us the faces of those that are gone. My face has vanished from me like the faces of my dear buried ones. All my trying is in vain. I know that the face I succeed in calling up finally is not my face. Ah, how sad it is! Nurse, tell me how many times I have asked you to set me before the mirror. I have remained there with my forehead against the glass, trying to remember myself, fastened there by I know not what mad expectation. And how many times, too, have I held my face between my hands, as I did just now, to catch its imprint in their sensibility! Ah, how many times I have seemed really to hold my own true mask imprinted in my hands, like the clay mask they take from corpses; but it is a lifeless mask!

[She uncovers her face slowly, holding her hands out with hollowed palms.]
Do you understand what a horrible misery it is?

Bianca Maria.

How beautiful you are, Anna!

Anna.

Last night I dreamt, something strange, indescribable. Sudden old age came over all my limbs; I felt furrowing wrinkles breaking out all over my body;
I felt the hairs falling from my head in great locks on my lap, and my fingers tangled in them as in unwound skeins; my gums were emptied and my lips stuck to them; and everything in me became shapeless and miserable. I became like an old beggar who is in my memory; a poor idiot that I saw every day, when I was still at home, and my mother was still living; every day in front of the garden gate. Do you remember, Nurse? They called her Simona; and she always stammered out the same song, hoping to make me smile. What a strange dream! And yet it corresponds with a painful feeling I have sometimes of myself, if I hear life hurrying. In the silence and darkness, sometimes, I hear life hurrying with such a terrible noise, Bianca Maria, that I would gladly die, only not to hear it any longer. Ah, you cannot understand!

**Bianca Maria.**

I understand, Anna. To me too, in the light, the passing hour sometimes gives an inexplicable anxiety. It seems as if we are awaiting something that never happens. Nothing has happened for so long.

**Anna.**

Who knows? [A pause.] I no longer feel the sun.
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BIANCA MARIA.

[Turning towards the loggia and looking at the sky.] A cloud is passing, but it is faint: a golden cloud, shaped like a wing. Every day clouds pass over the blue sky; they rise yonder, over the Gulf of Argos, and go towards Corinth. I see them rise and set. Some of them are marvellous. Sometimes they remain for a long time on the horizon, and in the evening they light up like bonfires. None of them yet distils a drop of water. The whole country is thirsty. Yesterday a pilgrimage set out from Charvati to the chapel of the Prophet Elijah to implore rain. The dearth is everywhere, and the wind carries the dust of the tombs to a great height.

ANNA.

You do not like this land, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA.

It is too sad. At certain moments I feel almost frightened. When we went to Mycenae for the first time, my brother and I, two years ago, it was an afternoon in August, very burning. All the plain of Argos, behind us, was a lake of flame. The mountains were tawny and savage, like lionesses. We went up on foot, in silence, suffocating, almost unable to
breathe, our eyes dazzled. Now and again a silent vortex rose suddenly at the side of the way, like a pillar of dust and withered grass, and followed us noiselessly, with the footsteps of a phantom. Seeing it coming near us, I could not help an instinctive terror, as if that mysterious form revived the terror that had been inspired in me by those ancient sins. On the edge of a great ditch, Leonardo picked up the slough of a serpent, and said laughingly, "It was in the heart of Clytemnestra." And he twisted it like a ribbon about my hat. The wind shook before my eyes the little glittering tail, with the rustle of a withered leaf. And my throat was scorched by a horrible thirst. We sought for the Fountain of Perseia in the excavation, under the citadel. So great was my fatigue that, when I put my hands and lips in that icy water, I fainted. When I recovered my senses, I seemed to find myself in a place of dreams, out of the world, as if after death. The wind continued, and the columns of dust followed one another up the height, disappearing in the sun, which seemed to devour them. An immense sadness fell upon my soul; a sadness such as I had never felt, unforgettable. I seemed to have come into a place of exile without return; and all things took a funereal appearance to me, giving me I know not what anguishing appre-
hension. Never shall I forget that moment, Anna! But Leonardo supported me and drew me along, full of hope and courage. He was sure of finding his princes of the Atridae, untouched in their unknown tomb. He said to me, laughing: "You are like the virgin Iphigeneia about to be dragged to the sacrifice!" And yet his gaiety and his confidence could not hearten me. You see, Anna, that every day his expectation is deceived. This accursed soil, that he upturns ceaselessly, has given him, up to now, nothing, except the fever that consumes him. If you could see him, Anna, you would be anxious about him.

Anna.

It is true. His voice, sometimes, is like a choked flame. Yesterday, feeling the touch of his dry and wasted hand, I fancied he was ill. He was near me when you came in: he started like one who is frightened. While you were there, I felt him shiver from time to time, as if your words made him suffer. I have a strange way of knowing these things, Bianca Maria. My eyes are closed to my soul, but it hears. It heard yesterday those poor suffering nerves trembling, ah, with what distress! I was going to speak to you of this, Bianca Maria.
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BIANCA MARIA.

[With manifest anxiety.] Do you think my brother is really ill?

ANNA.

Perhaps he is tired. His strength is exhausted. His idea tortures him like a passion. He does not sleep, perhaps. Do you know if he sleeps?

BIANCA MARIA.

I do not know, Anna. For some time past he has given up the room where he used to sleep, next to mine. I knew then that he slept soundly, by the peacefulness of his breathing. Now he is further away.

ANNA.

Perhaps he does not sleep.

BIANCA MARIA.

Perhaps. His eyelids are red and swollen. But he lives continually in the midst of that irritant dust; he is always there, bending over the ruins, unearthing the remains, breathing the exhalation of the tombs. Ah, what a terrible will he has! I am sure that he will give himself no repose till he has wrested from the earth the secret he is seeking.
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Anna.

It seems as if he, too, had a secret.

Bianca Maria.

What secret?

Anna.

Who knows? [A pause.

Bianca Maria.

For some time past he has changed, completely. He was so kind to me, once! I was everything to him; the one companion of his youth. How often I have seen him tired, but not like this! He would rest his soul on my knees, like a child. But not now. When I go near him, he seems to shut himself up. Once, when the force of his thinking made his forehead ache, he liked me to hold my fingers on his temples, to put to sleep that distressing pulsation, and he was grateful to me for it as for a delicious medicine. But not now. He seems to avoid me. You said, Anna, that my words yesterday made him suffer. . . .

Anna.

[With a penetrating accent.] Perhaps he feels that in you too something is changed, Bianca Maria.
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Bianca Maria.

[Alarmed.] In me?

Anna.

[With the same accent.] Perhaps he divines the cause of your sadness, and it distresses him.

Bianca Maria.

The cause of my sadness?

Anna.

[Veiling the acuteness of her divination.] You do not like this land, and you want to leave it.

Bianca Maria.

I am, now and always, obedient to his will.

Anna.

Here is the sun again. Your cloud has passed over. How hot it is! It almost burns. Give me your hand, please, Bianca Maria. Help me to rise and get down.

[Bianca Maria gives her her hand, raises her, and leads her down the steps. Anna, still holding the hand in hers, and drawing it towards her as if to listen to the pulse, asks her suddenly:

Did you see my husband to-day, before he went out?
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BIANCA MARIA.

[hesitating a moment.] Yes, I saw him, with my brother.

ANNA.

Do you know where he went?

BIANCA MARIA.

He had his horse saddled, and he went along the road to Argos, alone.

ANNA.

He has not cared for work any longer now, for some time. He is away for whole hours; when he comes back, he says nothing. Do you remember, Bianca Maria, the first week after our arrival? Do you remember his ardour? He, too, like Leonardo, had immense treasures to discover, but in his own mind. It seemed as if this soil had, as no other had, the property of carrying his thought to the point of exaltation. The flood of poetry was so abundant in him that he poured it out without ceasing, almost in every word. Do you remember? Now he is taciturn and absorbed.

BIANCA MARIA.

[Almost with trepidation.] Perhaps he is planning some great work. Perhaps he has within him the
burden of some great idea, still formless. His genius is perhaps about to give birth to some marvellous child.

Anna.

He is fond of talking with you, Bianca Maria. Has he not told you anything?

Bianca Maria.

[Always with a slight faltering in her voice.] What could he have told me that he has not already told you, dear Anna? You are so near to his soul, so near!

Anna.

I am as near to his soul as a beggar before a door. Perhaps he has nothing more to give me.

Bianca Maria.

[Gently ] Why do you say these things? I see his eyes when they turn to you. His look says always that he has nothing dearer and that he finds nothing more beautiful. How beautiful you are, Anna!

Anna.

It is as if you would console me for some good thing that I have lost.
Bianca Maria.

Why do you say these things?

Anna.

[Listening.] Did you hear? Alessandro is coming back. Look, Nurse, from the loggia, and see if he is coming.

[The Nurse, who has remained seated on the steps, motionless, rises and goes to the loggia to look out.

The Nurse.

There is no one on the road.

Anna.

I thought I heard a horse's hoofs. Can he still be far away? It is late.

Bianca Maria.

From the window of my room I can see the road all the way to Argos. I will go and see if he is coming.

[ Goes out by the second door to the right. ]
SCENE II.

The Nurse goes up to Anna, who covers her face with her hands.

Anna.

I should like to cry, Nurse.

The Nurse.

[Taking her hands and kissing them.] What has my little one on her mind?

Anna.

I do not know: something that tightens about me, like a knot; and then, a kind of fear.

The Nurse.

Fear?

Anna.

I do not know. Let me sit down. Stay by me.

[She sits down. The Nurse kneels at her feet. Suddenly she bends her head towards her.

Look, Nurse; see if you can see any white hairs. I ought already to have some white hairs. Look well, Nurse; here, on the temples; here, on the neck. Have you found it, really? Only one? Many? Are there many?
THE NURSE,

[Who has laid a hand on her hair.] Not one.

ANNA.

Not one, truly? You tell me the truth?

THE NURSE.

Not one.

ANNA.

Am I still young? Tell me, do I seem still young? Tell me the truth.

THE NURSE.

So young, still.

ANNA.

Tell me the truth!

THE NURSE.

Why should I deceive you? You are as white as those statues. There is not a woman as white as you are.

ANNA.

It is true. Alessandro said that to me the first time he ever spoke to me, long ago. Ah, it is for that that I have become blind, like the statues! What did Bianca Maria say just now about my eyes? Look into my eyes, Nurse. Are they not like two dull stones?
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The Nurse.
They are as liquid as two jewels.

Anna.
They are dead, Nurse; they are sightless. Do they not disturb you a little when they look at you fixedly? Do they not frighten you? Tell me the truth.

The Nurse.
Oh, hush! They are still living, they are still living. One day, all of a sudden, by the grace of God, they will get back the light they have lost.

Anna.
Never again! Never again!

The Nurse.
One day, all of a sudden; perhaps to-morrow.

Anna.
Never again! Never again!

The Nurse.
Who knows the Lord's will? Why should the Lord have left your eyes so beautiful if he did not want to light them up again?
ANNA.

Never again.

THE NURSE.

If all hope were really dead, why should my heart tremble every morning when you call me? Why should I turn to you always with the same expectation when I open the window of your room, every morning, to let the light in?

ANNA.

[With a deep shiver.] If it might be so!

THE NURSE.

And you, do you not dream all night that the sight has come back again to your eyes?

ANNA.

Oh, dreams!

THE NURSE.

Believe dreams! Believe dreams!

ANNA.

Here is Bianca Maria. Go, go, Nurse.

[The Nurse kisses her hands, rises, and goes out by the second door to left, with a silent prayer on her lips.]
SCENE III.

Bianca Maria re-enters.

Anna.

Is Alessandro coming?

Bianca Maria.

There is no one to be seen on the road to Argos. There was a cloud of dust a long way off; but it was a flock of goats. Perhaps he is coming back another way, across the plain. Perhaps he got down at the Fountain of Perseia.

[She goes up the steps and looks from the loggia, between the two columns, against the sun.]

The work goes fast, in the Agora. Yesterday they found five funereal columns, sure signs. A great cloud of dust rises from the enclosure. It is a reddish dust; it seems to burn, there in the sun. Ah, it seems as if it must penetrate the blood, like a poison. Certainly Leonardo is there on hands and knees, scraping about with his own hands. He is afraid that the blow of a spade may break those fragile things. [She turns towards the blind woman.] If you saw how delicately he touches every fragment of his mask of earth! You would think, to see him, that he was about to peel a
precious fruit and that he fears to lose a single drop of the juice.

[A pause. She comes down towards the blind woman, with a sudden languor, into the circle of the sun.

Anna, could you eat a perfumed orange? Would you like to be in a Sicilian garden now?

Anna.

[Making a gesture in the air as if to draw Bianca Maria towards her.] What a strange voice has come to your lips, Bianca Maria! It sounds like a new voice: like a voice that had been sleeping and that wakes suddenly.

Bianca Maria.

Are you surprised at what I desire? Would you not like to have a basket of fruit on your knees? Ah, how greedily I would eat it! At Syracuse we went through the orange groves, seeing the sea shine through the trunks of the trees; the trees had on their branches the old fruit and the new fruit; the petals fell on one's head like odorous snow, and we bit the juicy pulp as if we were biting bread.

Anna.

[Again holding out her hands to draw her towards
her, while Bianca Maria still remains a little way off.] There you should live. There, there is joy. All your being cries out for joy, needs joy. Ah, how your youth must shine to-day! The desire of life radiates from your body like the heat of a lighted hearth. Let me warm my poor hands!

[Bianca Maria goes near her, and sits at her feet on a low stool. As Anna touches her neck she has a manifest shiver.

Bianca Maria.

Why are your hands cold, Anna?

Anna.

All your face beats like a violent pulse.

Bianca Maria.

The sun has made it burn. Upstairs, at my window, I stayed looking out in the sun. The stone of the window-sill was almost scorching. Here, too, the whole room is flooded with the sun. The stream of light comes there, to the very feet of the Hermes. We are sitting on the margin of a golden rivulet. Lean a little forward.

Anna.

[Touching her vaguely on the face and hair.] How
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you love the sun! How you love life! I heard Alessandro say one day that you were like the Victory unlacing her sandals. I remember at Athens, in a marble as soft as ivory, a delicate and impetuous figure, that gave you the desire of flight, of an endless flight through the air. I remember, the little head was designed in the curve of the wing, that hung in repose from the shoulder. Alessandro said that the impatience of flight was diffused in every fold of the tunic, and that no other figure represented so vividly the gift of divine swiftness. We lived for some time under the magic of its gracious youth. Every day we went up to the Acropolis to see it. Is it true that you are like it, Bianca Maria?

Bianca Maria.

[Disturbed by the singular way in which the blind woman continues to touch her.] I have no wings. You seek for them in vain.

Anna.

Who knows? Who knows? Unseen wings are those that fly farthest. Every virgin may be a messenger.

[A pause. She continues to touch Bianca Maria with the tips of her fingers. Bianca Maria
makes an involuntary movement, as if to draw herself away.

You will not let me touch you! I feel that you are beautiful, and I want to realise for myself your beauty. Are my hands unpleasant to you?

Bianca Maria.

[Takes her hands and kisses them.] No, no, Anna. But I cannot tell you the sensation that they give me. It is as if your fingers saw. I do not know; it is like a gaze that fixes you, that presses upon you. Each of your fingers is like an eyelid that brushes against one. Ah, it is as if all your soul came down into the tips of your fingers, and the flesh lost its human nature. I cannot tell you what the colour of these veins is.

[She lays her lips in the palm of the left hand, trembling.

Do you not feel my lips on your soul?

Anna.

[With a secret despair.] They burn, Bianca Maria. And they are heavy, almost as if there were stored up in them all the richness of life. Ah, how tempting your lips must be! All promises and all persuasions must be in them.
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Bianca Maria.

You disquiet me. My life is enclosed within a narrow circle, perhaps for ever. Just now I read you the "Antigone." From time to time I seemed to be reading my destiny. I too have consecrated myself to my brother. I too am bound by a vow.

Anna.

[With a passionate and unquiet tenderness.] It is too great, the force of your life, to consume itself in sacrifice. You need to live, you need to enjoy, to bite into fruit, to pluck flowers, dear soul. I seem to feel a leaping flame in you. All your blood beats in your face, so strangely. Oh, I have never known so strong a beat. Your heart, your heart.

[She seeks on her breast the place of the heart, and leans to listen. She utters, with a more subdued voice, almost mysteriously, the following words:

It is terrible, your heart. It seems to desire the world. It is mad with longing.

Bianca Maria.

O Anna!

[She trembles and contracts, under the blind
woman's hands, as if under a slow torture
that unnerves and overcomes her.

Anna.

Do not tremble. I am like a dead sister who
comes back to you. Once my blood, too, beat like
that; and my desire, too, was without limits towards
the immensity of life. I know that which dreams,
that which suffers, and that which waits. There is,
there is happiness upon the earth; over every head
hangs the hour of happiness. Devotedly you follow
your brother, who dwells among the ruins and gropes
in the tombs; but you cannot renounce your hour.
An imperious force rises within you all of a sudden,
and it is no longer possible to restrain it. Even if
you were to succeed in cutting it down, it would, it
would leave behind it a thousand germs among its
roots. You are fated to give way to it.

[Bianca Maria hides her face in the blind woman's
lap, and remains so, trembling.

Do not tremble! I am like a dead sister who gazes
at you from beyond life. Perhaps I am like a shadow
to you; I am in another world. You see that which
I do not see. I see that which you do not see. There-
fore you feel yourself removed from me by an abyss.
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And you cannot abandon your soul upon mine as you abandon your head on my knees. Is it not true?

[She puts her hands on Bianca Maria's hair, caressing it; then buries them in it.

What hair! What hair! It is as soft to the fingers as tepid water flowing. But what floods! What floods! It is marvellous. If you let it down it would cover you to your feet. Ah, now it is coming down.

[Bianca Maria's hair falls down over her shoulders, and over Anna's knees, flowing like a great stream. The blind woman's hands follow the waves of it.

It is a torrent. It covers you all over. It falls to the very ground. It covers me too. What floods! What floods! It has a perfume, it has a thousand perfumes. A torrent full of flowers! Ah, you are altogether beautiful, you have every gift!

[She puts her hands to her forehead, to her cheeks, convulsively, with a gesture of anguish, as if she feels herself lost. Her voice is veiled.

How could you renounce one who loved you? How could you remain in the shadow, you who are made to give joy? Some part of you slept in darkness which has awakened now. You know yourself now; is it not true? I have listened to your step, sometimes. You moved as if you followed in yourself a melody
that you knew. Ah, if I could tell you the word of happiness, Bianca Maria!

[Bianca Maria sobs, buried under her hair, suffocatingly.]
You are weeping!

[She feels for her eyelids through the hair, seeking the tears.]
You are weeping! You are weeping! Ah, have pity upon us!

[A pause. Bianca Maria sobs, always in the same attitude. Anna turns anxiously towards one of the doors. A great anxiety shows itself on her face as she hears a rapid step on the stairs.]

Here is Alessandro!

[Bianca Maria starts to her feet, her face hidden in her hair, which covers her all over, quivering and frightened, in the circle of the sun.]

SCENE IV.

Alessandro enters by the first door to the right, carrying a bunch of wild flowers, a little anxious and heated. He stops short, seeing Bianca Maria in evident confusion.
ANNA.

She was reading me the "Antigone." All of a sudden the pity of it overcame her.

ALESSANDRO.

And you wept for Antigone!

ANNA.

She was on the steps of the loggia, she saw the clouds of dust rise from the Agora, and the thought of her brother filled her with distress.

ALESSANDRO.

You were reading the narrative of the watcher. Never is Antigone so beautiful as under that tempest of flaming dust, in the barren plain, while she shrieks and curses over the naked corpse of her brother. Is it not so? Sitting on the hill, against the wind, to escape the odour of the putrefying corpse, the watchers wait with closed eyes till the blinding tempest has passed; and she, fearless in the midst of that horrible fire, gathers the dust with both hands and strews it over the corpse. Ah, it is always like that that I see her! She is not so beautiful and so great when she leads Œdipus by the hand, or when she goes to the place of execution. Is it not so? I should like to
have been there when you read it, Bianca Maria. I have never heard you read.

**Anna.**
Would you not read a few pages more?

**Bianca Maria.**
I have not the book.

**Anna.**
Did you leave it on the window-sill?

**Bianca Maria.**
I left it . . . I don't know where, Anna.

**Alessandro.**
You will read to me, one day.

**Bianca Maria.**
I will read whenever you like.

**Alessandro.**
One day I should like to hear you read the "Electra" of Sophocles, in the shadow of the Gate of the Lions.

**Anna.**
Ah, the invocation to light!
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ALESSANDRO.

One day I should like to hear you read one of my poems.

ANNA.

Which of your poems?

ALESSANDRO.

[Uncertain.] Which?

[A pause. Through the open loggia comes a confused clamour. BIANCA MARIA runs rapidly up the stairs and looks towards the Acropolis.

BIANCA MARIA.

[Excitedly.] It is the men in the Agora. They are shouting for joy. Perhaps they have discovered a tomb; perhaps they have found the king. Leonardo! Leonardo!

ALESSANDRO.

[Going up towards her.] Do you see Leonardo?

BIANCA MARIA.

No. I do not see him. The dust hides everything; the wind is stronger. He must be there, on his knees, under the dust. Leonardo!

ALESSANDRO.

Your voice cannot reach him. He cannot hear you.
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BIANCA MARIA.

They are not shouting now. Listen!

[The hair falls down again, unbound.

ALESSANDRO.

They are not shouting now. There is not a sound to be heard.

[A pause. Both remain for some moments side by side, in silence. The wind blows BIANCA MARIA's hair towards ALESSANDRO.

ANNA.

It is strange, this silence.

[They both come down the steps, thoughtfully. All at once, feeling a pull at her hair, BIANCA MARIA utters a little cry. The blind woman rises to her feet, trembling. The dead lark falls from her lap.

Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO.

[Trying to laugh.] It is nothing, Anna. One of BIANCA MARIA's hairs got entangled in the stone of my ring and broke off. Did it hurt you?

BIANCA MARIA.

Oh, scarcely.
Alessandro.

One day I should like to hear you read one of my poems.

Anna.

Which of your poems?

Alessandro.

[Uncertain.] Which?

[A pause. Through the open loggia comes a confused clamour. Bianca Maria runs rapidly up the stairs and looks towards the Acropolis.

Bianca Maria.

[Excitedly.] It is the men in the Agora. They are shouting for joy. Perhaps they have discovered a tomb; perhaps they have found the king. Leonardo! Leonardo!

Alessandro.

[Going up towards her.] Do you see Leonardo?

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No. I do not see him. The dust hides everything; the wind is stronger. He must be there, on his knees, under the dust. Leonardo!

Alessandro.

Your voice cannot reach him. He cannot hear you.
Bianca Maria.
They are not shouting now. Listen!
[The hair falls down again, unbound.

Alessandro.
They are not shouting now. There is not a sound to be heard.
[A pause. Both remain for some moments side by side, in silence. The wind blows Bianca Maria's hair towards Alessandro.

Anna.
It is strange, this silence.
[They both come down the steps, thoughtfully. All at once, feeling a pull at her hair, Bianca Maria utters a little cry. The blind woman rises to her feet, trembling. The dead lark falls from her lap.

Alessandro!

Alessandro.
[Trying to laugh.] It is nothing, Anna. One of Bianca Maria's hairs got entangled in the stone of my ring and broke off. Did it hurt you?

Bianca Maria.
Oh, scarcely.
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[She puts down the flowers on one of the steps and again tries to do up her hair.]

Alessandro.
Pardon me. I was not noticing.

Anna.

[Simply, dissimulating.] Bianca Maria's hair is soft. Have you felt it, Alessandro? I should like to have it always between my fingers, like a spinner.

[She goes waveringly towards Bianca Maria, putting her arm round her and resting against her shoulder caressingly.]

Alessandro.

[Again trying to laugh.] Oh, I did not dare to touch it. The wind blew it against me. And the theft is involuntary: some threads of silk to bind together the scattered pages. [He tries to extricate the hairs from the ring.] But they are inextricable. What knots chance binds!

Bianca Maria.

[Starting.] Listen! [A fresh clamour is heard.] They are shouting again.
Some great discovery.

Alessandro.

Did you notice, Bianca Maria, how restless and anxious Leonardo was this morning? He looked as if he had had a feverish night. Perhaps he was visited in dreams by the "King of Men," and awoke with some great presentiment. Did not the ardour of his eyes trouble you? I could not look at him without pain. I thought a great deal about him, in the country. I hoped he would have come with me: he would have heard the song of the larks, and plucked some flowers with those fingers of his that have known only the stones and the dust for too long. Ah, he has been bending over the hard grey earth too long! Fascinated by the tombs, he has forgotten the beauty of the sky. I ought to tear him away finally from this witchcraft.

Bianca Maria.

You alone can do it. You know what power you have over him.

Anna.

[In a low voice.] He is sick; he is very sick.

[Bianca Maria looks at her with a start,
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frightened, and letting fall the bunch of flowers.

Alessandro.

Truly, he has at times the aspect of a man stricken by witchcraft. And here, the earth that he digs in is evil: it must still give out the exhalations of monstrous deeds. The curse that weighed on the Atridae was so deadly that there must have remained some vestige still to be dreaded in the dust that was trodden by them. I understand how Leonardo, who lives with the most intense inner life, should be disturbed by all this to the point of frenzy. I fear that the dead whom he seeks, and cannot succeed in finding, have come to life in him again violently, and breathe within him with the tremendous breath that Æschylus infused into them, vast and bloodthirsty as they appeared in the "Oresteia," thrust through ceaselessly with the sword and brand of their destiny. Ah, how many nights I have seen him come into my room and sit down by the side of my bed, with the book that made him sleepless! How many nights he has sat up with me, reading aloud those great lines that wearied him like cries, too measureless for our human breath! In his contact with this accursed earth, every day, every day, he must feel the fever
increase within him. All the ideal life with which he has nourished himself must have assumed in him the form and impress of reality. I think that at every stroke of the spade he must tremble through all his bones, longing to see really the face of one of the Atrides, still untouched, with the signs yet visible of the violence he endured, the cruel death.

Bianca Maria.

Listen! listen!

[A new and longer clamour is heard. Bianca Maria, agitated and impatient, goes up to the loggia; she looks towards the Agora, in the full sunlight.

They have gone up on the walls; two, three, four men on the walls. They shout, they shout for joy, they shout towards me, they wave their arms! Look! look!

[Anna has taken the arm of Alessandro and holds it tightly, standing at the foot of the stairs, quivering with anxiety. Bianca Maria goes out on the loggia and leans over the balustrade, shouting. In the intervals between her brief phrases she seems to catch some gestures and words of her brother, who comes rapidly nearer.
Leonardo! Leonardo! He is there, he is there! I see him. He is coming out from the Gate of the Lions; he is running down; he is white with dust. Something great, something great! Brother! Ah! he has fallen, he has caught his foot against a stone. Good God! He is getting up again; he is running. Brother! Here he is, here he is! The tombs; he has discovered the tombs, all his tombs. Thank God! Ah, joy, joy! My brother! Here he is, here! He is coming!

[She comes down into the room, runs to the door, and opens it.

At last! at last! He is at the door, he is coming up. At last, joy, joy, joy! Brother! Brother!

SCENE V.

Leonardo comes in by the first door to the right, white with dust, covered with sweat. His eyes shine, his face is hardly recognisable. Excitement keeps him from speaking; his hands tremble violently; they are black with earth, covered with bleeding scratches. The whole room is inundated with sunlight.
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LEONARDO.

The gold, the gold . . . the bodies . . . great heaps of gold . . . bodies all covered with gold.

[The excitement overcomes him. BIANCA MARIA and ALESSANDRO are near him, panting, invaded by the same excitement. ANNA stands alone; leaning against the table, she bends towards the voice of LEONARDO.

BIANCA MARIA.

[With pitying tenderness.] Be calm, be calm, Leonardo; take breath; wait a minute. Shall I give you something to drink?

LEONARDO.

Oh yes, something to drink. I am dying of thirst.

[BIANCA MARIA goes towards the table, fills a glass with water, and gives it to him. He drinks it greedily, at one gulp.

BIANCA MARIA.

[Trembling.] Poor brother!

ALESSANDRO.

Sit down, do! Wait a minute.

LEONARDO.

[Laying his hand on ALESSANDRO'S shoulder.] Ah,
why were you not there? Why were you not there? You ought to have been there, Alessandro. The greatest and strangest vision that has ever been seen by mortal eyes; a bewildering apparition; unheard-of riches; a terrible splendour, laid bare all of a sudden, as in a more than mortal dream. I don't know how to tell you, I don't know how to tell you what I have seen. A succession of tombs; fifteen bodies intact, one beside the other, on a bed of gold, with faces covered with masks of gold, with foreheads crowned with gold, with breasts bound with gold; and over all, on their bodies, at their sides, at their feet, over all a profusion of golden things, innumerable as the leaves fallen from a fabulous forest: an indescribable magnificence, a great dazzling light, the most glittering treasure that death has ever heaped up in the darkness of the earth, for centuries, for thousands of years. I don't know how to tell you, I don't know how to tell you what I have seen. Ah, you ought to have been there, Alessandro! Only you would have known how to tell it.

[He stops for a moment, as if short of breath. All hang feverishly on his lips.

For a moment my mind leaped back hundreds and thousands of years, breathed the terrible legend, trembled in the horror of that ancient massacre.
The fifteen bodies were there, with all their limbs, as if they had been laid there, just after the murder, lightly scorched by the funeral pyres too soon extinguished: Agamemnon, Eurymedon, Cassandra, and the royal escort; buried with their garments, with their weapons, with their diadems, with their vases, with their jewels; with all their riches. Do you remember, do you remember, Alessandro, that passage in Homer?

"And they lay, among the vases and among the tables laid for the feast; and all the place was splashed with blood. And they heard the lamentable voice of the daughter of Cassandra, whose throat the perfidious Clytæmnestra cut beside me." For a moment my mind traced that ancient and violent life. They were there, the slain ones: the King of Kings, the slave princess, the charioteer, and the others: there, under my eyes for a moment, motionless. Like a vapour that exhales, like melting foam, like dust that is scattered, like I know not what inexpressibly faint and fugitive thing, all vanished into their silence. It seemed to me as if they were swallowed up by the same fatal silence that was about their radiant immobility. I don't know how to tell you what happened. There was left a heap of precious things, an unparalleled treasure, the witness to a great unknown civilisation. You shall see, you shall see.
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ANNA.

[Submissively.] What a dream!

Alessandro.

What a glory! What a glory!

Leonardo.

You shall see. The masks of gold. . . . Ah, why were you not there, at my side? . . . The masks preserved the faces from the contact of the air, and the faces must have remained almost intact. One of the bodies exceeded all the others in stature and in majesty, wearing a large crown of gold, with cuirass, girdle, and shoulder-plates of gold, surrounded with swords, spears, daggers, cups, covered with innumerable discs of gold scattered over his body like petals, more venerable than a demi-god. I leant over him, while he melted away in the light, and I lifted the heavy mask. Ah, have I not indeed seen the face of Agamemnon? Was not this perhaps the King of Kings? His mouth was open, his eyelids were open. Do you remember, do you remember Homer? "As I lay dying I lifted my hands towards my sword; but the woman with dog's eyes went her way, and would not close my eyelids and my mouth, so that I went down thus to the abodes of Hades." Do you
remember? Now, the mouth was open, the eyelids were open. He had a large forehead, bound with a round leaf of gold; the nose long and straight; the chin oval; and, as I lifted the cuirass, it seemed to me that I half saw the hereditary sign of the race of Pelops "with shoulders of ivory." All melted away in the light. A handful of dust and a heap of gold.

ALESSANDRO.

[Astonished and dazzled.] You speak like one who is coming out of an hallucination, like one who is in prey to a delirium. What you say is incredible. If you have really seen what you say, you are no longer a man.

LEONARDO.

I have seen, I have seen! And Cassandra! How we have loved the daughter of Priam, "the flower of the prey!" Do you remember? How you have loved her, with the very love of Apollo! You liked her when she was deaf and silent on her car, for her "look as of a wild beast but newly caught," for the Delphic fire that smouldered under her Sibylline words. More than one night her prophetic cries have awakened me. . . . And she was there, just now, stretched on a bed of gold-leaf, with innumerable butterflies of gold on her breast, with her forehead
crowned with a diadem, with her neck circled with necklaces, with her fingers covered with rings; and a golden balance was laid on her breast, the symbolic balance in which the destinies of men are weighed, and an infinity of golden crosses, formed with four leaves of laurel, surrounded her; and her sons Teledamus and Pelops, bound with the same metal, were at her side like two innocent lambs. . . . Thus I saw her. And I called out to you in a loud voice, as she vanished away. And you were not there! You shall see the mould of her shape, you shall touch her empty girdle.

ALESSANDRO.

[Impatient and agitated.] Let me see, let me run. . . .

LEONARDO.

[ Holding him back, with an irresistible need to go on speaking, to communicate to the others his own febrile excitement. ] Marvellous vases with four handles, ornamented with little doves, like the cup of Nestor in Homer; great bulls' heads, in massive silver, with the horns all of gold; thousands of thin plaques worked in the form of flowers, of leaves, of insects, of shells, of shell-fish, of jelly-fish, of stars, fantastic animals of gold, of ivory, of crystal: sphinxes, griffins, chimeras,
little figures of divinities with the arms and the heads laden with doves; miniature temples with towers crowned by doves with open wings; the chase of lions and panthers, incised on the blades of swords and spears; combs of ivory, bracelets, clasps, seals, sceptres, caducei. . . .

[While he evokes these splendours, Anna lets herself sink down on a seat, and covers her bowed face with her hands, resting her elbows on her knees.

Alessandro.

[Freeing himself.] Let me go! Let me go!

Leonardo.

[Rising in a frenzy.] I am coming with you. Let us go.

Bianca Maria.

[Putting her arm round her brother, and entreating him, while her hair again comes undone and falls over her.] No, no, Leonardo. I beg of you! Stay here a little, rest a little, at least take breath! You are too tired; you are worn out.

Alessandro.

I am going, I am going.

[ Goes out by the door on the stairs. ]
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BIANCA MARIA.

[Still holding her arm round her brother pityingly.] Oh, how you are exhausted, poor brother, poor brother! You are quite dripping. Sweat is mixed with dust: your face is almost black. And those poor eyes, those poor eyes! How they are inflamed! Your eyelids are red and swollen as if you had wept for a whole year. Do they not pain you? Oh, how they must pain you, poor eyes! I will give you a water that I know of, to wash them, to refresh them. And now you will rest, will you not? You will rest now that your vow is accomplished. You have covered yourself with glory; you shone, just now, when you came in, you shone with all that gold.

[She almost covers him with her hair, leaning up against him. Infinitely tender, she wipes with her hair his forehead, his eyes, his cheeks and throat; she envelops him in her sweetness. LEONARDO seems almost to rebel against it, rigid, with an extraordinary expression of pain and terror on his exhausted face, suffused with a mortal pallor.

Let me wipe you with my hair, let me wipe you with my hair! I cannot tell you the pain you give me. I do not know what I should give you to soothe your
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weariness; I do not know what balsam, I do not know what potion. Ah, how many days, how many days you have been there, shut in with the earth, in that ditch, breathing the accursed dust, tearing your hands on the stones, ceaselessly, ceaselessly! Poor hands! They are all cut, stained with blood, the nails broken, almost without flesh, dry as tinder. Do they not hurt you? Poor hands! I will give you a paste that I have, very soothing, perfumed with violet, that will heal them quickly, will make them white and soft again as they were once. I remember: your hands used to be so soft and white. How you tremble! How you tremble! [Anna suddenly raises her head.] You must be dead with weariness. You have drawn out your life like a bow, almost to breaking! There is not a vein in you which does not tremble. All the nerves tremble in your body like slackening cords. You are suffering, you are suffering!

[She seems struck by the remembrance of the words pronounced by Anna, and stops short, with an expression of anguish. Then she takes her brother's head between her hands, trying to look straight into his eyes.

You have nothing against me, have you? I have not done anything, have I? Not done anything that has troubled you? Tell me, tell me, Leonardo! Answer! ]
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LEONARDO.

[With spent voice, trying to smile.] Oh, nothing!

BIANCA MARIA.

I have never loved you as I do now, brother. My tenderness for you has never been so deep. You are my constant thought; you are everything to me. Take me with you where you will, into the most barren desert, into the most desolate ruin; and if you smile, and if you are happy, I am content. I would like to come and stand by you in the midst of the dust, and tear my hands too against the stones, and pick up the bones of the dead too; but you must smile, you must have a cloudless brow. Do you remember? Do you remember? At Syracuse you sang over your work, and it seemed as if you had in your mind the beauty of the statue that you sought. I picked out the sweetest oranges for you, and brought them to you; and you would not eat them if I did not peel them with my fingers. Do you remember? When you were tired, you slept with your head on my knees, under the shade of the olives; and I watched over your calm sleep, thinking of the statue that you sought. Ah, how long a time, how long a time it is, since I have watched you sleep! You must have an infinite need of sleep, of sleep. You cannot hold
your eyelids open. Come, come to your room. I will help you. Let me be like a mother to you! You must sleep, you must sleep with a long, deep sleep; you must let your mind grow clear again, like tranquil water. When you awake you will see all the gold that you have discovered. And I will still be by your pillow. Come, come!

[He tries to free himself from the enveloping sweetness, as if under an unbearable torture.

I will not feel you tremble so! I will not feel you tremble so! Come!

Leonardo.

I must go back there again.

Bianca Maria.

It is impossible. It is midday. Do you not see? The sun is right over it, a burning sun. Have you not left your watchmen there?

Leonardo.

I must go back, I must go back.

Bianca Maria.

It is impossible. You cannot go back there again as you are. You would fall by the way. Listen to
your sister! You seem as if you are going to faint. Let me hold you up.

[She guides him forward, throwing her arm round his shoulder, almost covering him with her hair, tenderly. He is pale and helpless. Anna rises in silence and leans towards them, listening, while they go out by the second door to the right. The room is flooded with sunlight.

SCENE VI.

Anna, left alone, makes a few uncertain steps, oppressed by a vague sadness.

Anna.

[With a dull, almost inaudible voice.] No one spoke to me. I am in another life. And all that funereal gold. . . . And that poor trembling soul. . . . And all the sweet life burning in that beautiful creature.

[Her feet come against the bunch of flowers fallen from Bianca Maria's hand.]

Ah, the wild flowers that he picked for her!
[She stoops, takes up the bunch, and buries her face in it, remaining silent for some moments.

I could weep. [She makes a few more steps.] Nurse! Nurse!

**The Nurse.**

[Running in from second door to left.] Here I am, here. [Takes her hand and kisses it.

**Anna.**

What time?

**The Nurse.**

It is midday.

**Anna.**

Here, take these flowers and put them in a vase of water.

**The Nurse.**

They are all faded; they cannot live any longer.

**Anna.**

[Letting fall the bunch.] Let us go.

[In the act of moving, guided by The Nurse, she stops and turns, as if remembering something.

Ah, look, Nurse, there; look for it on the floor.
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The Nurse.

[Bending to look about.] What have you lost?

Anna.

Look for it there. It is a dead lark.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.
THE SECOND ACT

One of Leonardo's rooms. Along the walls, painted a dark red, are great shelves containing the treasures found in the tombs of the Agora: the goblets, the breastplates, the masks, the diadems, the sword-hilts, the golden girdles, shine confusedly in the shadow. On two tables, placed in the form of biers, are all the rich garments that covered the corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra, laid out so that they indicate the outline of the absent bodies. Some coffers full of gold, some copper vases full of ashes, stand at the foot of the two tables. On the right is a closed door. In the background is an open balcony looking on the plain of Argos and the distant mountains. It is near the hour of sunset.

SCENE I.

Bianca Maria stands arranging the marvellous spoils. She stoops to take the collars, the bracelets, the
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breastplates, the targets, the little images, out of the coffers, and lays them on one of the tables, about the golden mask of the prophetess. Some spirals of gold wire come under her fingers, little spirals that were used to hold back the escaping hairs from the forehead. She tries to fasten them in her hair, curiously. She hears, outside the door, the voice of Alessandro.

Alessandro.

Leonardo, are you there?

Bianca Maria.

[starting and hesitating.] My brother went out some minutes ago. I don't know where he has gone.

[She goes to the door and opens it. Alessandro appears on the threshold.

Alessandro.

[Almost timidly.] Ah, you are alone, alone in the midst of the gold. I was looking for Leonardo.

Bianca Maria.

I don't know where he has gone. Perhaps he went to the Fountain of Perseia.

[Both avoid looking at one another.]
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Alessandro.

[Making a step forward.] You have remained to guard the treasures, Bianca Maria. What are you doing?

Bianca Maria.

I am returning her jewels to Cassandra. Do you see? All that coffer is full of them. I promised my brother that everything should be in order by the time he comes back, early in the evening.

Alessandro.

Shall I help you? It is getting late.

Bianca Maria.

It is getting late.

Alessandro.

[Moving towards the treasures.] Strange! it seems to me as if a sort of indistinct figure rises out of the heaped-up gold. Twilight, or lamp-light, could deceive our eyes, create the whole form anew. Certainly Leonardo knows the illusion. He must have seen more than once the aspect of the sons of Priam.

Bianca Maria.

[Sighing.] Ah, his eyes seem to see nothing now but phantoms!
ALESSANDRO.

[Softly.] I am not less sad for him than you, Bianca Maria. I was looking for him, hoping. . . . Some days, whenever he is with me, he seems always anxious to tell me a secret. Then I let silence come over us; and wait, not less anxious than he. His lips seem about to open. But he refrains; they remain closed. And I dare not question him, fearing to snatch from him by force a word that his soul is not yet ready to tell me. And both suffer together, obscurely. [A pause.] What are you thinking of, Bianca Maria?

BIANCA MARIA.

[Shaking off the thought.] Will you help me, then? My brother will be back soon.

[She leans over the coffer. ALESSANDRO watches her.

ALESSANDRO.

What have you got in your hair?

[Approaches her.

BIANCA MARIA.

[Confused.] Ah, the spirals . . . I put them there as a proof. I wanted to show them like that to
Leonardo; he seemed still to doubt what they were used for. [She makes a movement to take them out.

Alessandro.

[Trying to prevent her, with an uncertain gesture, and without touching her.] No, no. Why do you want to take them out? Leave them where they are!

Bianca Maria.

[Trying to smile.] I must give them back to the dead princess, whom you have loved so dearly.

Alessandro.

No, no. Keep them a little longer in your hair.

[In trying to prevent her from taking them out, he touches her hand. Both are perturbed. They look at one another with a kind of restrained violence. A pause.

Bianca Maria.

[Lowering her eyelids, and in a low voice.] You are not helping me.

[Another pause. Both lean over the coffer of gold.

Alessandro.

Look at the intaglio of this ring: a seated woman, holding three poppies, and three ambiguous figures
standing before her, and over her head the double-bladed axe and the radiating disc of the sun. Look at this other: a young woman seated, holding out her arms and turning away her head, and before her a man who also holds out his arms. Look: the woman has a great mass of hair!

**Bianca Maria.**

She turns away her head.

[A pause. **Bianca Maria arranges the ornaments about the phantom bodies.** **Alessandro goes towards the window, and looks over the country for some moments.** Both fight against the anguish that increases upon them.

**Alessandro.**

It has the very fever and aspect of thirst, this arid land. Every land breathes more freely as night comes on. This tells over the torture of its thirst even at nightfall. To the very end of twilight one sees the dry beds of its streams whiten sorrowfully. The mountains yonder, do they not look to you like a flock of wild asses, with those sharp backs piled one above another? One feels the marshes of Lerna, there, beyond the Pontines. Look how the Arachneon flames! Almost every night its summit reddens, in
memory of the fire that told the watchers of Clytæmnestra of the fall of Troy. From Ida to the Arachnæon, what a long line of burning tidings! I re-read to-day that marvellous enumeration of the mountain peaks lit up by the victory. And now you can sift between your fingers the ashes of him who announced with such signs his coming! You wear in your hair the ornaments of the royal slave that he chose out of the spoils of war! [He goes near Bianca Maria, gazing at her.] And all this is simple, because it is you who do it. The abyss of time is bridged, between this living you and the spoils of the king and the prophetess that you watch over. All this gold seems to belong to you from time immemorial, because you are beauty and poetry; and all returns into the circle of your breath, all comes naturally under your dominion.

**Bianca Maria.**

[Pallid and trembling, leaning against the table on which the gold lies.] Do not speak to me so!

**Alessandro.**

Why may I not tell you the truth that you have opened my eyes to see? Do you not think, Bianca Maria, that the inner truth must come out, when it
demands to be told, by those who are resolved to live without feebleness and without falsehood? How often we have submerged in silence the unlooked-for things that are born in us and rise to our lips! I cannot think of them without regret and remorse. It seems to me that I see them floating under the silent water, like things cold and formless. And they might have awakened in us who knows what new joys, what new sorrows, what new beauty, as they met in the current of our living voices! Ah, he who hides, who dissimulates, who suppresses anything, lies against life. Why have we been all this while until now without looking in one another's eyes? Are we afraid of reading some shameful thing there? Are we afraid of seeing in our eyes what we both know already?

BIANCA MARIA.

[With anguish.] We know that which cannot be, and can never be.

ALESSANDRO.

Ah, one more denial of life!

BIANCA MARIA.

We know that there are things stronger than death in keeping two beings apart. Death could not have separated us as these things separate us.
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ALESSANDRO.

What things?

BIANCA MARIA.

You know. Sacred things.

ALESSANDRO.

Ah, I would thirst for thousands of lives that your life might drink, Bianca Maria.

BIANCA MARIA.

Do not speak to me so! There is about you, joined with yours, a life far more precious than mine: a diviner life. It is so profound that I have never been able to approach it without trembling in every vein. It seems as if nothing is unknown there, and nothing strange. Every time I have come near to her I have felt, in those depths, the presence of I know not what mysterious things of beauty, that have exalted and humbled me in the same moment. And I have never wept, as on those knees, tears that were so good and so sad to me.

ALESSANDRO.

You do not know with what terrible and sudden barrenness time strikes the highest human communings. The deepest roots remain buried and
knotted under the earth; all their subterranean force, once inert, can bring to birth not so much as a leaf or a flower. But do you not feel, when your life comes near to mine, an occult vibration that seems like the stirring of the sap in spring? Your very presence is enough to give my spirit an incalculable fecundity. When we were on the loggia, the other day, in the silence that followed your cry, and as the wind blew your hair towards me, my mind in a few seconds dilated beyond all limit, embracing an infinite number of new things; and the dust of the tombs was for it a wave of opening germs. We could sit side by side in solitude, far from the life of men, motionless and mute as the fields at morning, and every breath of wind would bring some marvellous seed.

**Bianca Maria.**

It is in you, in you, all the power. . . .

**Alessandro.**

In you are all those things which men regret without having ever possessed them. When I look at you, when I hear the rhythm of your breathing, I feel that there are other beautiful things to unveil, other good things to conquer, and that there are perhaps in the world things to be done, as delightful
as the most beautiful dreams of poetry. I do not know how to tell you what I felt one day, as I stood near you, in the first beginning of love and desire. It was an extraordinary sentiment that I can only express by the analogy it had with an awakening in my boyhood. I remember that awakening like a joyous nativity, like a dawn in which I was born to another life, infinitely more pure and potent, and suddenly over my head opened the closed hand of Destiny. I was sailing, for the first time, from Puglia toward Greek waters. It was in the Gulf of Corinth, in the Bay of Salona, at the anchorage of Itea, where I had to land for Delphos. You know these places, you that have wandered over all the shores sacred to mystery and beauty.

Bianca Maria.

[As in a dream.] Salona! I remember: a blue bay, with little secret creeks, like the hollows of shells, rosy as shells, towards evening. On the cavernous hills, between the grey stones, on that edge of red soil, trembled a few meagre ears of corn, mingled with bushes of aromatic plants. I remember: one evening, on a hill, the stubble caught fire. The light serpentine flames ran through the grey rocks as swiftly as lightning. I never saw a fire so gay and so bright.
The breeze brought in the scent of the burning herbs. All the sea seemed to be perfumed with wild mint. Thousands of frightened falcons wheeled about the conflagration, filling the sky with their cries.

**Alessandro.**

It was there, it was there! I had gone to sleep on the bridge, with my face turned to the stars, on a night of August. The rattle of chains awakened me as the ship was anchored. You know how far, even to-day, Parnassus spreads the sanctity of its ancient myth. Your eyes, into which the fairest and most august visions of the earth have passed, have certainly drunk in that ideal light which bathes the Mount of Apollo on summer mornings. Still lying down, I saw only the fabulous summits in the silent pallor of the sky; but through the gates came the crowing of cocks: a proud and agile sound, incessantly calling and answered, that filled the silence of that sublime dome. And never, never shall I forget the promise of joy that that awakening cry, at that place and in that dawn, gave to my new life!

**Bianca Maria.**

True, true! I remember.
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ALESSANDRO.

Well, the extraordinary sentiment of that distant morning returned to my mind in that liberal hour in which I discovered the virtue that is in you. Your lips were silent, but from all your blood I heard a singing that renewed that old promise. Ah, I knew it, I knew it! I knew well that all the promises should be fulfilled sooner or later. I waited, I was certain. I waited till my mind had come to its perfect maturity, that it might be able to draw to itself the supreme sweetness. I have increased as best I could its understanding, that it might the better be able to value the price of every rarer gift. I have bid it drink at every fountain, I have poured on it every perfume, I have impregnated it with every essence, that in its fulness it might feel the more vividly its insatiable nature. And I have waited. I have waited! And you have come like a messenger, you have appeared on my way at the moment in which I turned back perplexed, seized by disquietude at the too long delay. At other times I had seen you, I had heard the sound of your voice; but at that moment you came to me as a new creature, unfolding suddenly out of the chrysalis that hid it. At other times I had gazed at you without seeing you, I had listened to you.
without hearing you. Now I know you; and you remind me of all the promises of that morning. And not one of them will I renounce, not though I have to constrain fate with force that it may fulfil them.

**Bianca Maria.**

*Writhing with anguish.* Be silent! Be silent! You speak like a drunken man.

**Alessandro.**

*No longer restraining his ardour.* I need you, I need you! If ever the forms that I have given to my thought have seemed beautiful to you, if ever the words of my poetry have seemed consoling, if ever you have recognised any elevation in my mind—please, please!—do not misunderstand the necessity that draws me to you. My life at this moment is like a stream swollen with the spring floods, and burdened with up-torn forests, which give force to the close and encumbered current of its own abundance that bears it onward. And it seems to me that you only, that you only can remove the obstacle: you only, with a blade of grass, with the stem of a flower in your little hand.

**Bianca Maria.**

Not I, not I. Your dream blinds you.
Alessandro.

You, you only! I have met you in dreams as now I meet you in life. You belong to me as if you were my creation, formed by my hands, inspired by my breath. Your face is beautiful in me as a thought in me is beautiful. When your eyelids quiver it seems to me that they quiver like my blood, and that the shadow of your eyelashes touches the root of my heart.

Bianca Maria.

[Blindly.] Be silent! Be silent! I cannot breathe. Ah, I cannot live any longer, I cannot live any longer!

Alessandro.

You cannot live if you do not live in me, for me, now that you are in my life as your voice is in your mouth. How long I have waited for you! With what faith I have waited for you! I do not ask you what you have done in the years in which we were strangers, hidden from each other, invisible to each other, though indeed sometimes neighbours, sometimes breathing under the same sky. I know it, I know it! You have sent your soul deep down into mystery and beauty; you have drunk poetry at its remotest springs, you have dreamed your dreams in the splendour of
the highest of accomplished destinies. I know, I know what you have done, because I find here the ancient human soul in the freshness of your love.

**Bianca Maria.**

*In confusion.* You exalt with your breath the humblest of creatures. I have been only a good sister: I have carried with me my simple tenderness wherever my brother was working.

**Alessandro.**

But was there not also another creature living beside the good sister? She dimmed with her breath the gold of the Syracusan medals, but freshly taken out of the brute earth, and the immortal impressions became bright again under the warmth of her fingers. She knelt beside the trenches where lay the fallen statues, set free their faces from the lifeless crust, and saw all at once the serenity of a divine life smile out of the dark earth. At Marathon, on the battlefield, she read with eyes full of tears the names of the fallen Athenians, inscribed on a heroic column; and at Delphos divined the mystic melody of the *paean* carved on the marble of a sacred pillar. Wherever there was a trace of the great myths or a fragment of the imaginings of beauty with which the chosen race
transfigures the force of the world, she passed with her reviving grace, passing lightly over the distance of centuries as if she followed the song of the nightingales across a country strewn with ruins.

**Bianca Maria.**

Who was she? Can I recognise myself in her? In you everything is transformed! I have been only a feeble helper, but an eager one; and the joy and pain of my brother were as my joy and my pain. My heart trembled when his heart trembled.

**Alessandro.**

Ah, of what mystery and of what beauty have you not the reflection upon you! You too, you too, like Cassandra, whose ashes and whose gold you have gathered up, have set your foot on the threshold of the Scian Gate. Through the strata of the seven superimposed cities your eyes have recognised the signs of the fatal conflagration prophesied by the indefatigable voice that now, in your shadow, is silent. Is not, then, the error of time annulled for you? Are not the years of the ages abolished for you? It was to be that in a living and beloved creature I should find that unity of life towards which tends all the force of my art. You alone
possess the divine secret. When your hand takes
the diadem that crowned the brows of the prophetess,
the gesture seems to evoke the antique soul; and an
ideal resurrection seems to greater so simple an act.
There is a reviving potency in you of which you your-
self are unconscious. The simplest of your actions
suffices to reveal to me a truth of which I was uncon-
scious. And love is like the mind: it shines in
proportion to the truth that it discovers. Tell me,
then, tell me what seems to you more sacred than
this, and worthier to be preserved and exalted above
every impediment and against every denial.

Bianca Maria.

[Without force.] No, no. You are intoxicated with
yourself. What you see in me is in your own pupils.
Your words create out of nothing the image that you
would love. In you, in you is all the power.

Alessandro.

What is it worth? What is it worth? All the
power that is in me would remain shut up and dis-
persed in a thousand inner vortices, if the divine will,
that is in you, did not draw it out and incite it to
manifest itself in forms and motions of joy. Joy,
joy, I ask of you! The other day, when I gave
you the flowers, there were traces of tears in your face; but about you, in the sun, all your impatient hair breathed joy. It is needful that I should be free and happy in the truth of your love, that I may at length find the eternal verse for which many are looking to me. I need you, I need you!

Bianca Maria.

[Recovering her forces.] Well, tell me, tell me what you wish to do? What you wish to do with me, with the creatures that I love, that you love? Tell me.

[A pause.

Alessandro.

Let destiny accomplish itself.

Bianca Maria.

But the sorrow? But the sorrow? Do you not feel that a cloud of sorrow is over our heads, and that it darkens and oppresses us? Do you not feel the dear neighbouring souls suffer in the divination of some blow or in the fear of a disaster that they know not how to ward off? You have reminded me of my tears. Ah, if I could tell you all the anguish of that day, if I could tell you my pity and my distress! She knew, she knew. I felt that she knew. Her
hands, so living, ah, too living! searched my soul as one feels a garment in its most hidden folds. Never can I forget the suffering! My secret was in her hands, and she shredded it as one shreds a plucked rose. And all the time I felt in her I knew not what sweetness mingled with her despair! and it seemed to me as if her heart now knitted itself up and now opened out like the calix of a flower, and that she lifted herself thirstingly up towards life. [A pause.

Alessandro.

[Hesitating.] Do you think she is sure?

Bianca Maria.

She is sure. [A pause.] And he? Do you not think that in him, too, there is a suspicion?

Alessandro.

Oh no! Not a suspicion. I know him so well.

Bianca Maria.

But his inexplicable change, but his secret and half-savage sadness, but his manner towards me. . . . Sometimes he fixes upon me an almost intolerable gaze. When I come near him, when he takes my hand, it seems to me sometimes that a violent repulsion surges against me out of his whole being.
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Alessandro.

You deceive yourself, Bianca Maria. He has not a suspicion. But his sickness agitates him strangely.

Bianca Maria.

His sickness! You, too, then think that he is really ill?

Alessandro.

His nerves are harassed by a too long and a too resolute tension. Obscure imaginations doubtless torment his enfeebled spirit. Certainly, there is something inexplicable in him. But he will speak to me, he will reveal to me the phantom that pursues him, he will confess to me his terror. It is not with impunity that a man discovers the tombs and looks upon the faces of the dead; and of such dead! [A pause.] He will speak to me. Yesterday he was going to speak to me. I will look for him this evening. Do you not know where he has gone?

Bianca Maria.

I do not know. Perhaps to the Fountain of Perseia. That is the place he likes best when he wants to be alone. Water! Water! Ah, what is there in the world more beautiful than water? Everything here
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is dry, everywhere thirst, thirst. There is the only refuge; a sweet murmur that stills, that stills thought.

[She moves away from the table where the gold is, towards the balcony, with slow languidness.

Water! Water! What a long time since I have seen a great stream flowing through a green meadow, a lake in a crown of trees, a cascade whiter than snow.

ALESSANDRO.

[Stopping her suddenly as she passes, and taking her hands, pallid with desire.] Ah, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful and sweet indeed, and fresh indeed as running water, as water that takes away thirst! All your beauty, ah, it seems to me that all your beauty floods my senses like living water, like palpitating, like trembling water. Ah, beautiful, beautiful, to none so beautiful as to me!

BIANCA MARIA.

[Languidly.] Let me go, let me go, Alessandro!

ALESSANDRO.

[As if drunk.] I feel the love in all your veins, in your hair, rising, rising; I see it overflowing from under your eyelids. I feel the perfume of tears from under your eyelids. All your face grows white before
me. You are all within me like a draught that I have drunk.

[He leans towards her lips, to kiss them. She draws back, convulsed, half restraining a cry. They remain face to face, panting, unable to speak.]

**Bianca Maria.**

[Trembling.] Do you hear?

**Alessandro.**

What?

**Bianca Maria.**

*Her voice.* [Both listen for some seconds.] It is her voice, it is her voice. She is looking for us; surely she is looking for us.

**Alessandro.**

Do not fear, do not fear.

**Bianca Maria.**

She knows all, she understands all. It is impossible to hide. Before she passes the threshold she will have heard the beating of our pulses. It is impossible to hide.
[Sadly.] There is no need to hide anything from the soul that is worthy to receive the truth, Bianca Maria.

But the sorrow, but the sorrow!

She is the slave of sorrow; and it is not given to me to set her free. She is in another life!

In another life!

[She bows her head and moves towards the door.

SCENE II.

Anna, led by The Nurse, appears on the threshold. Her whole aspect expresses an extraordinarily calm sorrow.

Anna.

Bianca Maria!

Bianca Maria.

[Taking her hand.] Here I am, here.
Go, go, Nurse.

[The Nurse goes out. Bianca Maria leads the blind woman towards Alessandro.]

Alessandro!

I am here, Anna.

[The blind woman gives him her hand. He takes it. And she remains for some instants in silence, thus, between the two. Then she moves away from him and draws Bianca Maria to her.]

Give me a kiss, Bianca Maria. [She kisses her on the mouth.] It seems to me as if you have been away from me for an indefinite time. What have you been doing? [Bianca Maria hesitates to reply.] What have you been doing?

[Confusedly.] I have been here, almost all day, helping my brother.

[Alessandro goes out on the balcony, and remains leaning on the balustrade looking over the country.]
Anna.
Is this the room of the gold?

Bianca Maria.
It is the room of the gold.

Anna.
And of the ashes?

Bianca Maria.
And of the ashes.

Anna.
Where are the ashes?

Bianca Maria.
There, in the copper vases.

Anna.
Lead me to them: I want to touch them.

Bianca Maria.

[Leading her up to one of the sepulchral vases.] Here, here are the ashes of Cassandra; these are the ashes of the king.
Anna.

[In a low voice.] Cassandra! She, too, saw . . . she saw, always within her, misfortune and death.

[Leans over the vase, takes a handful of ashes, and lets it run through her fingers.] How soft her ashes are! They run through the fingers like sea-sand. You were reading her words yesterday, Alessandro. Among so many terrible cries there is one flutter of breath infinitely sweet and sad. The old men liken her to the "tawny nightingale." What were they, what were they, those words of hers when she remembered her fair river, and when the old men asked her concerning the love of the god? Do you not recall them?

Bianca Maria.

He did not hear you, Anna.

Anna.

He did not hear me?

Bianca Maria.

He is on the balcony.

Anna.

Ah, on the balcony.
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BIANCA MARIA.

[Turning towards the balcony.] He is looking at the sunset. It is a marvellous sunset. Behind the Artemisio all the sky is on fire. The summit of the Arachneon burns like a torch. The red reflection reaches to here; it strikes on the gold.

ANNA.

Lead me up to the gold.

BIANCA MARIA.

[Leading her to one of the tables.] Here are the spoils of Cassandra.

ANNA.

[Touching lightly.] Is her mask here?

BIANCA MARIA.

[Guiding the blind woman's hand.] It is here.

ANNA.

[Feeling the golden mask.] How large the mouth is! The horrible travail of divination had dilated it. She cried, cursed, lamented ceaselessly. Can you imagine that mouth in silence? What, in silence, could be the form of those sorrowful lips? What stupor, when she is silent, when the spirit gives her
breathing-pause between two clamours! I want you to re-read to me to-morrow that dialogue between her and the old men. You do not remember those words of hers when she speaks of the god who loved her, and the old men ask her if she had given way to the fighter? I see her red with shame: “I promised,” she says, “I promised. . . .” Do you not remember her words?

**Bianca Maria.**

* [Always more perturbed.] No, Anna. To-morrow I will read it to you.

**Anna.**

“I promised, but I deceived him,” she says. She deceived the god, who avenged himself. No one believed her again! She was alone, at the top of a tower, she and her truth. [A pause. *She continues to feel over the spoils.*] Do you too love her, like Alessandro, that “tawny nightingale”?

**Bianca Maria.**

Her fate is horrible. She is a martyr.

**Anna.**

She was very beautiful; she was as beautiful as Aphrodite. Leonardo saw the face under the mask
of gold! It is strange, but it seems to me as if I too had seen it. What colour, do you think, were her eyes?

_Bianca Maria._
Perhaps black.

_Anna._
They were not black, but they seemed so, because the pupils, in the prophetic ardour, were so dilated that they devoured the eyes. I think that in the pauses, when she wiped the foam off her livid lips, her eyes were as sweet and sad as two violets. They must have been so before they closed for ever. Do you remember, Bianca Maria, her last words? Do you not recall them?

_Bianca Maria._
I will read them to you to-night, Anna.

_Anna._
She speaks of a shadow that passes over things, and of a wet sponge that wipes out all traces. Is it not so? "And for this," she says, "I sorrow more than for the rest." They are her last words.

[A pause. _She holds in her hands a pair of golden scales._

Listen!
Bianca Maria.

They are the falcons of Mount Euboea crying.

Anna.

How they cry to-night!

Bianca Maria.

When the air is hot they cry louder.

Anna.

Why do they cry? I would like to understand the voices of the birds, like the prophetess. I did not know that episode of her infancy, that Alessandro told me. She was left one night in the Temple of Apollo, and in the morning they found her lying on the marble floor, in the coils of a serpent, that licked her ears. From that time she understood all the voices in the air. She would have understood the cry of the falcons.

Bianca Maria.

[Half forgetting herself.] Cries of joy, cries of joy! What beautiful, proud creatures, if you could see them! They are full of life, they are all armed with life! They have the colours of the rocks: the wings brown, the body reddish, the breast whitish, the head
grey. Nothing is more gracious and more ferocious than their little grey head where the black eyes glitter in a yellow circlet. The other evening, as I looked at them in the sky, one of the watchmen shot one of them in the breast with his gun. He fell at my feet, and I picked him up. Though he was wounded to death, he tried to dart at my hand. The blood suffocated him and dripped from his beak; a sort of sobbing shook him, while the red drops fell one by one. The eyes glazed, the claws contracted, the head dropped on the breast. Then one more sob of blood. It was the last. There remained in my hand a kind of rag. And a life so free and so violent, a few moments before, had palpitated in the skies!

**Anna.**

How you speak of life and how you speak of death, Bianca Maria! [A pause.] Alessandro is on the balcony?

**Bianca Maria.**

He is on the balcony.

**Anna.**

What is he doing?

**Bianca Maria.**

He is looking far away. [A pause.]
Anna.
What is this that I have in my hand?

Bianca Maria.
A pair of scales.

Anna.
Ah, a pair of scales! [She touches the two scales.] Was it laid on the breast of the dead princess?

Bianca Maria.
On her breast.

Anna.
To weigh the destinies! But it is not level, is it? No, it is damaged. It seems to me that it droops on one side.

Bianca Maria.
It is damaged. On one side one of the strings of gold that support the scales is wanting.

Anna.
On which side?

Alessandro.
[Coming in from the balcony.] Here is Leonardo. Leonardo is coming.
Bianca Maria.

Where from?

Alessandro.

From the Fountain of Perseia.

Anna.

[Putting down the scales.] Shall we go down to the Fountain of Perseia, Bianca Maria? Will you lead me? We can sit down there for a little while on the stone near the spring, and breathe the perfume of mint and myrtle: it does one good.

Bianca Maria.

I am with you, Anna. Here is my arm.

SCENE III.

Leonardo enters, and turns his lucid and restless gaze on all three. His aspect expresses an incessant disquietude and a painful effort at self-repression.

Leonardo.

[Going towards the blind woman with an affectionate movement.] Ah, are you here too, Anna?
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Anna.

Have you come from the spring?

Leonardo.

Yes, I have come from there. I go there almost every day, about sunset. It is the hour at which the perfume of the myrtles becomes as strong as incense, almost stupefying. To-night it is very strong: it seems to rest on the water. As I drank, I seemed to feel in the water the savour of essential oil.

Anna.

Do you hear, Bianca Maria?

Bianca Maria.

Shall we go, Anna? Here is my arm.

Anna.

[Taking the arm of her guide.] We are going to the spring. Alessandro, has the sun set?

Alessandro.

[On the edge of the balcony.] It has set.

Anna.

There is no more light?
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Alessandro.
Yes, yes, there is still a little light

Anna.
That is why the falcons are crying.

Alessandro.
They cry late, the falcons: till the first stars.

Anna.
Good-bye. [She goes out with Bianca Maria.

SCENE IV.

Alessandro remains near the balcony, leaning against the side of the door, and looking over the country. Leonardo follows his sister with his eyes, as she leads the blind woman across the threshold.

Alessandro.
What is that fire there, on the top of Larissa? Look. One, two, three fires. Another fire there, under Mount Lycone. Do you see? Do you see the columns of smoke? They seem motionless. Not a
breath stirring. What infinite calm! It is one of the most beautiful and solemn evenings that I have ever seen.

[A pause. Leonardo goes up to his friend, puts one hand on his shoulder with a brotherly gesture, and remains silent.

Look at the colour and outline of the mountains against the sky. Whenever I look at them in the evening I make a spontaneous act of adoration before their divinity. In no land, as in this, does one feel all the sacredness that there is in the sight of distant mountains. Is it not true?

Leonardo.

[With a changed voice.] It is true. One should pray to the mountains: they are pure.

Alessandro.

How pure they are to-night! They seem formed out of sapphire. Only the Arachnæon is still rose-coloured: its summit is always the last to fade. But those fires? They multiply, they increase all along the hills to the very plain. Look, under Larissa, there is a crown of them. It is strange that the columns of smoke should be so white. They seem as if illuminated by another light, by an invisible moon. Do
they not? And they are religious; perhaps they bear the prayers of men.

LEONARDO.

Perhaps. Men are praying for water for the thirsty earth.

ALESSANDRO.

This thirst is terrible.

[A pause. LEONARDO moves away, walks several paces into the room, in which the shadow commences to darken about the treasures, which shine indistinctly. He is unable to contain his agitation. He goes up to the table on which lie the spoils of Cassandra. ALESSANDRO follows him with an anxious expression.

Ah, you are looking to see how well Cassandra's jewels are arranged! Bianca Maria was arranging them when I came in to look for you. I was going to help her; but . . . we talked . . . and the time went by like a flash. We talked about you, too, Leonardo.

LEONARDO.

[Agitated.] About me?

ALESSANDRO.

Of you: of your secret.
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LEONARDO.

[Turning pale.] Of my secret?

ALESSANDRO.

[Going up to his friend and taking his hand gently.] What is the matter? Tell me, what is the matter? Why do you tremble so?

LEONARDO.

I do not know why I tremble.

ALESSANDRO.

Am I no longer, then, the brother of your soul? So many days I have waited, so many days, for you to speak to me, for you to confess to me your trouble. Do you not trust me, then? Am I no longer for you one who understands everything, to whom you can say everything?

LEONARDO.

[Repressing the anguish that chokes him.] Yes, yes, Alessandro, you are that always. What do I not owe to you? What was I before I knew you, before communicating with your soul? What was I? I owe you everything: the revelation of life. You made me live with your flame; you made the things about me, that were dead to me, live. Ah, what would this
hour have been for me if I had not known you? Dead metal. And you, you alone have made me worthy of seeing wonders.

**Alessandro.**

And now? Now, can I do nothing for your malady?

**Leonardo.**

*Confused.* I do not know what is the matter, I do not know what is the matter. I do not know what my malady is.

**Alessandro.**

My poor friend! For two years, for two long years, you have been here, in this land of thirst, at the foot of this naked mountain, drawn into the fascination of the dead city, digging, digging in the earth, with those frightful phantoms always before your eyes in the burning dust. How is it your strength has not given way sooner? For two years you have breathed the deadly exhalations of the uncovered tombs, bowed under the horror of the most tragic destiny that has ever overwhelmed a human race. How could you resist, how have you not been afraid of madness? You are like a man who has been poisoned; and at times I have seen your eyes like those of a madman.
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LEONARDO.

Yes, yes, true, I am poisoned.

ALESSANDRO.

Why would you not listen to me? When you summoned me, when I came here, you were already taken with this evil fever. I foresaw the peril. And I wanted to break you of your fixed idea, to take you away, to interrupt your terrible labour. Do you not remember? We were to have passed the spring at Zante, at the seaside, not far from here. But your obstinacy was invincible; the sorcery had taken hold of you. But now let us go away without delay, let us go to the waters, the woods, the green earth. You must drop into the embracing arms of the fair green earth, and sleep there deep in the grass, letting new thoughts sink into you one by one.

LEONARDO.

Yes, yes, you are right. I must go away, I must go far away. Where? Where? And she too . . . and she too, my sister, Bianca Maria . . . will be with us. She too will be with us.

ALESSANDRO.

[Puzzled and hesitating.] She too. Do you not think that she, too, is oppressed; that she, too, needs
to breathe freely, to live? She sorrows for you, she weeps for you.

Leonardo.

Weeps? Weeps?

Alessandro.

She is afraid that you no longer love her, that you no longer have for her the tenderness of old times.

Leonardo.

[White and hoarse.] The tenderness of old times . . . she weeps? weeps?

Alessandro.

[Again taking his hands almost violently.] But what is the matter? What is the matter? Why are you trembling like that?

Leonardo.

[With a despairing force.] Ah, if you could but save me!

Alessandro.

I must, I will, save you, Leonardo.

Leonardo.

You cannot, you cannot. I am lost.

[He takes a few steps in the room, blindly; goes towards the balcony; goes towards the door,
closes it. He turns towards Alessandro, staggering, as if assailed by a sudden delirium.

How can I tell you, how can I tell you? Ah, it is a horrible, horrible thing!

Alessandro.

[Overwhelmed by the action and the words.] Leonardo!

Leonardo.

[Dropping on a seat and clasping his forehead between his hands.] A horrible thing!

Alessandro.

[Taking his hands again, and leaning towards his face, in the shadow.] But speak, speak! Do you not see that you wring my heart?

Leonardo.

Yes, I will speak. I will tell you. . . . But do not look at me so close, do not hold my hands. . . . Sit there. . . . Wait. . . . Wait till it is darker. . . . I will tell you. . . . I must tell you . . . yes . . . you only. . . . Horrible thing!

Alessandro.

[Sitting a little away, speaking in a low voice, in the shadow.]
anxiety that oppresses him.] See, I will sit here. . . .
I wait. . . . I wait. You are in the shadow. I hardly see you. Speak!

**Leonardo.**

How can I say it!

[A pause. The two are opposite to one another in the shadow, lit up by the glimmer of the gold. When Leonardo begins to speak, his voice is harsh and interrupted. Alessandro listens motionless, though his whole being is contracted with anguish.

Ah, you know her, you know her. . . . You know how sweet, how tender, how pure a creature she is . . . my sister. . . . You know, you know what she has been for me in these years of solitude and labour. . . . She has been the perfume of my life, the repose and the freshness, the counsel and the comfort, and the dream, and the poetry, and all. . . . You know, you know. . . . [A pause.] What other joys have there been for me in my youth? What other woman has crossed my path? None. My blood coursed quietly in my veins. I have lived as in a void; I have trembled only before the beauty of the statues that I unearthed. Our life has always been pure as a prayer, in solitude. Ah, that solitude! How long,
how long have we lived side by side, brother and sister, alone, alone and happy, like two children! I have eaten the fruit which she had marked with her teeth and drunk water out of the palm of her hand. [A pause.] Alone, always alone, in houses full of light! Now imagine one who unwittingly drinks a poison, a philtre, some impure thing that envenoms his blood, that taints his mind; so all of a sudden, while his soul is at peace. . . . Imagine this incredible disaster. . . . You are in an ordinary moment of your life, in a moment like other moments; it is a day in winter, lucid and limpid as the diamond: all is clear, all is visible, near and far. You are coming back from your work; your attention slackens; you discover nothing singular in yourself, in things; your breathing is calm, your soul is at peace, your life moves just as it did yesterday, in its going on from past to future. . . . You come home to your house, which is full of light and silence as it was yesterday; you open a door; you go into a room . . . and you see her, her, her, your innocent companion; you see her asleep before the fire, all coloured with the flame, with her little naked feet held out to the heat. You look at her and smile. And as you are smiling, a sudden and involuntary thought traverses your mind: a muddy thought against which your whole being has a shiver
of repugnance. . . . In vain, in vain! The thought persists, increases in force, becomes monstrous, becomes a tyrant. . . . Ah, is this possible? . . . masters you, fills your blood, invades all your senses. And you are its prey, its miserable and trembling prey; and all your mind, your pure mind, is infected; and everything in you is stain and contamination. . . . Ah, is this credible?

[He rises to his feet, feeling a shiver run through Alessandro in the shadow. All his body is shaken with a trembling like that of fever. He takes a few steps towards the balcony, then sits down again. Alessandro's eyes are wide open and fixed upon him.]

Now, imagine my life here, in this house, with her and with the monster. Here, in the house full of light and full of darkness, I alone with her alone! . . . A desperate, secret struggle, without respite, without escape, day and night, every hour and every minute, more atrocious as the unconscious pity of the poor creature brings her closer to my malady. . . . Nothing was of avail, neither half-frantic work nor half-bestial fatigue, neither the stupor coming to me from the sun and dust, nor the anxiety with which I saw every day new signs appearing in the earth that
I searched: nothing, nothing was of avail in dominating the horrible fever, in interrupting for a moment the wicked madness. I would close my eyes when I saw her coming towards me afar off; and my eyelids upon my eyes were as fire on fire. And I would think, while my pulses dinned in my ears, I would think with an anguish that seemed almost as if it must be the last in my life: "Ah, if, when I open my eyes, I could see her as I saw her once, see again the sainted sister!" And my will would shake my wretched mind, to free it from evil, with the violent shudder and the mad terror of one who shakes his garments in which a reptile is hidden. Useless, always useless! She came to me with a step that was certainly her accustomed step, but that seemed to me different, and that perturbed me like some ambiguous language. And the more she saw me sad and restless, the more gentle she was to me. And when her calm hands touched me, all my bones trembled and chilled, and my heart stopped beating, and my forehead was bathed with sweat, and the roots of my hair felt, as it were, the fear of death. . . . Ah, worse than death was the doubt in me lest she might have divined the truth, the tremendous truth! [A pause.] The night! The night! If the light was terrible, the darkness
was yet more terrible: the darkness warm with breath, the darkness that brings hallucination and delirium. . . . She slept in the next room to mine. Every night, at the door, she put up her cheeks to me, before going to bed; sometimes she spoke to me from her bed, through the wall. . . . When I listened I could hear her regular breath as she slept, while I lay awake in anguish. Sleep was impossible! It seemed to me that my eyelids hurt my eyes; my eyelashes were like pricks in a wound. . . . And the heavy hours died one after another; and the dawn came, and with the dawn came slumber upon that intolerable fatigue, and in the slumber, dreams. . . . Oh, dreams, infamous dreams, against which the mind is helpless! Better to lie awake, better to suffer on the pillows as on thorns, better to agonise with weariness. . . . Do you see? Do you see? When at last sleep falls suddenly on suffering like a crushing blow, when the poor flesh becomes dull and heavy as lead, when the whole being longs to die, to die a little—do you understand?—the desperate fight against the necessity of nature, in the terror of becoming in sleep the helpless prey of the loathsome monster. . . . I awake terrified, as if after the crime, with my whole flesh contracted with horror, not knowing if I have dreamed
or if I am still warm from the offence, more weary than ever, more wretched than ever, hating the light—I that am in terror of darkness!—with an instinct bidding me hold down my head and look on the earth like a brute.

Alessandro.

[His voice suffocated, unrecognisable.] Be silent! Be silent!

[He rises convulsively, no longer able to restrain his grief; goes to the balcony; draws a long breath, and raises his face to the starry sky.

Leonardo.

Ah, I have suffocated you. . . . Look, look at the stars! Breathe, you who can. . . .

Alessandro.

[In a low voice, going towards him, touching his head with a trembling hand.] Be silent now! Be silent! No more. . . .

[He takes several steps in the shadow, staggering; goes towards the door, opens it, looks out into the darkness, closes it; then returns towards Leonardo, who has his face between his hands, bowed down, and touches his head. He goes
back to the balcony. Leonardo rises and joins him. Both in silence, side by side, gaze over the country, lit up by scattered fires in the extraordinarily calm and pure evening.

END OF THE SECOND ACT.
THE THIRD ACT

The same room as that in which the First Act took place. The large loggia is open; above, in the space between the two columns, appears the night sky, palpitating with stars. A candelabrum burns on the table. There is a profound silence.

SCENE I.

Anna is seated near the steps; the night breezes pass over her white face, lifted towards the stars which she cannot see. When she speaks there is in her voice a singular, indefinable animation, like the volubility of a slight intoxication. The Nurse kneels before her, sad and submissive.

Anna.

[Stretching her hands towards the night.] A breeze comes, now and again. A little wind is rising, is it
ness, Nurse. I have always felt some drops of your milk in my heart’s blood, Nurse. Ah, your breast is dry, but your goodness is every day more and more. You led me by the hand when my little feet were not yet able to walk, and now with the same patient fidelity you lead me in the horrible darkness. You are a saint, Nurse. I have a paradise for you in my soul.

The Nurse.

Now you want to make me weep.

Anna.

[Throwing her arms round her neck.] Ah, forgive me, forgive me! I must make you weep.

The Nurse.

[Frightened, withdrawing herself from the embrace and looking in her face.] Why, why do you speak like that? Why do you hold me like that?

Anna.

[Trying to dissipate her anxiety.] Oh no, no . . . for nothing, for nothing. . . . I said so because now I cannot give you any joy, poor Nurse, any joy.

The Nurse.

You are not hiding anything from me, are you?
THE DEAD CITY

You are not trying to deceive a poor old soul, are you?
You are not trying to deceive . . .

ANNA.

No, no. Forgive me. I do not know what I am saying, to-night; I do not know what has come over me. . . . It is a strange volubility. Just now I felt as light as if I could rise from the ground; I was almost gay: I talked and talked. And then the sadness came back again, and I have troubled you. And now I feel better, I feel almost well, because I have kissed you, Nurse. If you could only hold me on your knees, and tell me the little far-off things that you remember about me, about me when my mother was living . . . Do you remember? Do you remember?

[A pause.] Ah, why have I not had a son, the son that he wanted: why? I should have been saved, saved! No mother has ever loved the child of her blood as I would have loved my child. All the rest would have seemed to me nothing. Continually, continually, I would have transferred the sweetest part of my life into his life. Continually I would have watched his little divine soul, to recognise in every atom the likeness, the one likeness; and his tenderness would have been dearer to me than light. . . . But the same Judge has made me blind and sterile: in punishment
ness, Nurse. I have always felt some drops of your milk in my heart's blood, Nurse. Ah, your breast is dry, but your goodness is every day more and more. You led me by the hand when my little feet were not yet able to walk, and now with the same patient fidelity you lead me in the horrible darkness. You are a saint, Nurse. I have a paradise for you in my soul.

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of what sin, Nurse? Tell me. Some great wrong had been committed.

[A pause. The eyes of The Nurse are full of tears.

How soon you left me, my mother! She had me, she had me; and she adored me; and yet she was not happy. You know it, do you not? You know it well. You know why she died. You would never tell me, Nurse, why she died . . . and how she died.

The Nurse.

[Perturbed, hesitating.] It was a fever, a great sudden fever that carried her off in a night. Did you not know?

Anna.

Ah no, no, it was not the fever. Why would you not tell me the truth?

The Nurse.

Is not that the truth?

Anna.

Not that, not that. At nightfall my mother came to my bedside; and I, while I slept, felt her kisses on my face, and something warm like tears. . . . Ah, the sleep was so strong that it overcame the troubled pain in my heart; and it seemed to me, in the last
glimmer of consciousness, that she rained upon my face, my neck, my hands the rose-leaves that I had scattered that day in the fountain in the garden. That was the last vision that I had of my mother. . . . Then you came and awakened me, and you asked me if I had seen her, and when and how she had left me; and you were in great distress. And then I went to sleep again, listening to a trampling that came from the garden, as of people seeking for something. And in the morning you came and awakened me again, and wrapped me in a cloak and carried me in your arms, that were trembling; carried me into the other house, where you spoke in a low voice, where all spoke in low voices and were pale. . . . And I never saw her again. . . . And then, when we went into our garden again, you always drew me away from the fountain; and when you were there, your lips always moved as if you were praying. [A pause.] Tell me the truth! Tell me the truth! Why did she want to die?

THE NURSE.

[Confused.] No, no. You are mistaken, you are mistaken.

ANNA.

Shall I never know?
THE DEAD CITY

The Nurse.

You are mistaken. . . . Ah, you always will bring back sorrow again!

Anna.

[Caressing her.] Forgive me, forgive me! Now I have troubled you again! [A pause.] Do you smell the odour of the myrtles? Smell how strong it is!

[She rises and goes towards the open loggia, breathes in the perfume, stretches out her hands.

The wind has risen; it seems to ring against my fingers like a crystal. Is the door of my room, there, open?

The Nurse.

It is open.

Anna.

All the windows are open?

The Nurse.

All.

Anna.

The wind passes like a perfumed stream. Where is Bianca Maria?

The Nurse.

Perhaps in her room. Shall I call her?
Anna.

No, no. . . . Let her rest, poor creature! At the spring, the scent of the myrtles was so piercing that she almost fainted. I felt her waver as we got up. More than once I supported her. . . . See how sure I am, Nurse! I led her, not she me. I think I could go there and back alone.

The Nurse.

But why do you talk so much of that spring?

Anna.

We are all drawn to it, as to a source of life. Is it not perhaps the only living thing in this place, where everything is dead and burnt? It alone quenches our thirst; and all the thirst that is in us reaches out greedily towards its freshness. If it were not for it, none of us could live here; we should all die of thirst.

The Nurse.

But why have we come to this accursed place? Here is summer upon us all of a sudden, like hell. We ought to leave it. When are we going away?

Anna.

Soon, Nurse, soon.
THE DEAD CITY

The Nurse.

It is, indeed, a place accursed of God. The chastisement of heaven is upon this land. Every day processions go out to the chapel of the prophet Elijah. At night the country is full of fires. But not a drop of rain falls. If you saw the stream! The paving-stones are dry and white as the bones of the dead.

Anna.

The Inachus! Alessandro crossed it the other day . . . the great day of the gold. [Groping by, she seats herself on the last step.] Shall I tell you the story of this river, Nurse? Listen. Once upon a time there was a king called Inachus, the king of the river; and this king had a daughter called Io, so beautiful, so beautiful that another king, an omnipotent king, the king of the world, fell in love with her and took her. But his jealous wife changed the virgin into a heifer white as snow, and gave her in charge to a shepherd called Argus, who had a hundred eyes. And this terrible shepherd pastured the white heifer not far from the sea, in the meadowland of Lerna; and by day and by night watched over her with his hundred eyes. Then the king of the world, that he might set her free, sent the prince Hermes to kill the cruel guardian;
and the prince Hermes, when he had come to the meadowland, began to play on his flute so sweetly, that Argus went to sleep; and in his sleep he cut off with his sword the great head with the hundred eyes. But the jealous wife sent a gadfly that penetrated the flank of the heifer like a point of fire, and made her mad with pain. With the gadfly in her flank, frantic Io began to run over the sea-sand; and she ran, and ran, and ran, and ran, and passed the stream, passed the straits, scaled the mountains, always with the gadfly in her flanks, mad with pain and terror, devoured with thirst and hunger, overcome with weariness, with foam at her mouth, panting, bellowing, without respite, without respite. . . . At last, in a far land, beyond the seas, the king who loved her appeared to her, and with a simple gesture, scarcely touching her, quieted her and gave her back her human form. And she bore to him a black child, and from that black child, after five generations, descended the Danaïdes, the fifty Danaïdes.

[She bends towards The Nurse, who has bowed her head on her breast, and drowsed.

Are you sleeping, Nurse?

The Nurse.

[With a start.] No, no. I am listening.
Anna.
You are sleepy, poor Nurse! Once it was you who
told me stories to send me to sleep. Go, go and rest,
Nurse, I will call you. I am expecting Alessandro.

The Nurse.
No, I am not sleepy, But your voice is so gentle.

Anna.
Is Alessandro in his room?

The Nurse.
He is there.

Anna.
I heard him shut the door. I heard him turn the
key.

The Nurse.
Shall I call him?

Anna.
No, no. . . . Perhaps he wants to be alone; perhaps
he is working. [Listening.] Some one is coming up
the stairs.

[The Nurse rises to go towards the first door on
the right,
SCENE II.

Leonardo enters hesitatingly. It seems as if the hard knot of his pain is less tightly drawn. He is cast down and sorrowful, but his self-pity gives him a kind of abandonment, for he has wept.

Leonardo.

[Going towards the blind woman almost humbly.] You are there, Anna. You are alone.

Anna.

[Rising and holding out her hands.] I thought some one would come. Alessandro is still in his room, and Bianca Maria . . . I believe she is resting. . . . She almost fainted, up at the spring, she was overcome by the too violent odour of the myrtles. [Addressing The Nurse.] Go, Nurse. I will call you.

[The Nurse goes out by the second door to the left.

Leonardo.

Ah, she almost fainted. . . .

Anna.

A dizziness. . . . She plunged her hands into the
water to revive herself. I brought her back. . . . How well I know the way! I think I could go there and back alone.

Leonardo.

You could never lose your way.

Anna.

Never, on that road.

Leonardo.

Will you not sit down, Anna?

Anna.

No. I should like to go out for a little while on the loggia. The night must be marvellous.

[Leonardo leads her up the steps. Both stop in the space between the columns. Anna leans on one of the double columns, with her face raised to the sky.

Leonardo.

It is marvellous. It is so clear that one can see all the stones in the walls of the dead city.

Anna.

You call it dead, the city of the gold! But it seems to me that it must live for you with an incredible life.
It seems to me that you must always see what you alone have seen.

**Leonardo.**

Ah, it is dead, quite dead! . . . It has given me all that it can give me. Now it is no more than a profaned cemetery. The five tombs are no more than five formless and empty mouths.

**Anna.**

They will hunger again. [A pause.] Are you looking at the stars?

**Leonardo.**

They were never so luminous; they have a scintillation so swift and so strong that they seem near. The Great Bear almost frightens one: he flames as if he had entered into the terrestrial atmosphere. The Milky Way seems to palpitate in the wind like a long veil.

**Anna.**

Ah, at last you recognise the beauty of the sky! Alessandro said that, fascinated by the tombs, you had forgotten the beauty of the sky.

**Leonardo.**

To look at the stars, the eyes must needs be pure.
120 THE DEAD CITY

Anna.

Has not Bianca Maria given you the medicine that she promised you for your eyes?

Leonardo.

[With a changed voice.] Yes; indeed, my eyes are beginning to get better.

Anna.

[Softly, trying to draw near to his soul.] You have something against your sister, Leonardo.

Leonardo.

[Starting.] I?

Anna.

More than once, Leonardo, more than once I have noticed your disturbance when she was present or when some one spoke of her.

Leonardo.

[Trembling.] You have noticed . . .

Anna.

Can you not trust me? Do you not believe that my soul is made for truth? Do you not believe that I am a little outside life? outside the beautiful and cruel life that the days give light to?
THE DEAD CITY

Leonardo.

Of what truth do you speak to me, Anna; of what truth?

Anna.

Of the truth that I know now, and that nothing can hide and that nothing can change, nothing can change.

[A pause. Terrified and perplexed, Leonardo gazes at her fixedly, leaning against the other column.

I know you are agitated, anxious, full of disquietude and of fears. I know that you suffer. And not only you suffer, Leonardo, but we all suffer; and each of us tries to hide from the others his own suffering; and each of us commits an injustice against the others and against himself, because he feels his own faith waver; and we remain without courage, doubting and humiliated, while the truth sits in the midst of us and looks at us with its inflexible eyes.

Leonardo.

I do not understand you yet.

Anna.

Oh, you need not be pitiful. If you feel there is
any nobility in my soul, if it seems to you that not unworthily and not uselessly I have been for so many years the companion of the man whom you love and admire beyond all; if it seems to you that I am not unworthy of the fraternal kindness that you have always shown me, Leonardo, do not be pitiful to me. Do not have for me the pity that you would have for a poor creature, feeble and afraid of pain. Nothing now is between us but the breath of night. This is the moment to speak out whatever in us is deepest and strongest. Any longer delay would be a weakness, perhaps a danger.

Leonardo.

[Convulsed and shaking.] I am bewildered . . . your words are so unexpected . . .

Anna.

For too long I have felt you suffer; for too long I have felt in my darkness . . . how shall I express it, how shall I express it? . . . felt a sort of tissue of secret things woven in silence: an impalpable tissue, and yet one that binds me as tightly as a cord. . . . Ah, I cannot live like this; I can live no longer, unless I live in the truth, now that the light of my
eyes has gone out. Well, let us tell the truth. I, I alone am the cause of all this misery. I no longer belong to the beautiful and cruel life, I am an obstacle in the way, a lifeless obstacle against which so much hope and force break and shatter. Whose fault is it if the dear creature obeys, trembling and weeping, the destiny that envelops her? Why do you remove your tenderness from her, if all that is human in her gives way before the most human of necessities? Something slept in her, that now has awakened suddenly; and she herself is terrified with the force of that awakening; she herself trembles and weeps at it. . . . Ah, I know, I know how the desire of life burns in all her blood! I have held her in my hands, I have felt her palpitate in my hands like a wild lark, fresh and perfumed with the morning air that she had drunk. All her face throbbed in the midst of her hair like a violent pulse. I never heard such strong throbbing. It is incredible, the force of life that there is in her. She herself is afraid of it as of an unknown evil, as of a frenzy that must overwhelm her. Sometimes she thinks that she has choked it under the weight of anguish, but all at once she is overcome by it, and a new voice comes to her lips, and she seems to speak involuntary words. . . . Just now, between the ashes and the gold, before you came in, she spoke
to me of a wounded falcon. The quiver of a thousand wings was in her new voice.

[A pause. Leonardo listens intently, without a movement, as if turned to stone against the column.

Whose fault is it, then, if she loves? Do you not think, Leonardo, do you not think that her youth has been sacrificed at your side too long? Can your fraternal love make up to her for the whole sacrifice of her life? She was overcome, this morning, as she read the lamentation of Antigone. It is not possible that all that force should be consumed in the sacrifice. She has need of joy; she is made to give and to receive joy. And would you, Leonardo, would you have her renounce her legitimate part of joy?

[A pause. Her courage seems to slacken.

And he . . .

[The voice dies away on her lips. The aspect of Leonardo expresses a mortal anguish.

. . . how can he help loving her? Certainly he must see in her the living incarnation of his most delicate dream: the Victory invoked to crown his life. What am I for him but a heavy chain, an intolerable fetter? You know what a profound aversion he has for all lifeless pain, for all useless trouble, for every hindrance, for every impediment that hinders the ascension of the
generous forces towards their supreme height. You know with what assiduous vigilance he looks about him and absorbs everything that can increase and quicken the active virtue of his spirit, for the work of beauty that he is going to achieve. Ah, what am I, what could be a poor half-living ghost, set against the infinite world of poetry that he carries within himself to reveal to men? What is my lonely sadness compared with the infinite sorrow to which he can give respite by the revelation of his pure art? I am but half alive, I have already one foot in the shadow: I have only a step, a little step, to make, and I am gone . . . oh, quite a little step! I know, I know all that gathers and twines about what remains to me of life, to make it more of an encumbrance: the legitimate bond, the custom, the prejudice, pity, remorse. I remember a stone column, corroded and broken, left on the quay of an old harbour where the skeleton of a ship was still to be seen above the water; I remember that useless fragment, about which were still to be seen the old knots of worn-out cables, the remains of ancient anchorages. All about there was nothing so sad to be seen. Seen from there, the free sea lured like a promise, inexpressibly.

[A pause. Her head drops on her breast for some moments; then she rouses herself and holds
out her hand to Leonardo, whom excess of emotion prevents from speaking.

I lose what I love, I save what I can. Put your hands in mine, Leonardo.

[Leonardo makes an uncertain step towards her, and gives her his hands; she trembles at the contact.

They are colder than mine; they are ice.

[They descend the steps.

Leonardo

[With faint and broken voice.] Forgive me, Anna, if I cannot say a word. . . . I will speak to you, I will speak to you to-morrow. Promise me that you will wait, that you will listen. . . . Now, I do not know, I cannot. . . . You understand, Anna. . . . Promise me that you will listen to me to-morrow.

Anna.

[Complainingly.] What can you have to say? Ah me, are not my words too much already? Have I not said what it was better not to say? Ah, always, always life escapes us and draws us after it, even when we would fly from it!

Leonardo.

[With a last flicker of hope.] You are sure, are you?
You are sure that she loves him, that she loves him. . . .
You are sure, Anna, of their love. . . . You are not making a mistake? It is not merely a doubt, a suspicion. . . . You are sure . . . sure . . .

Anna.

[Struck by his accent.] And you? And you? Are not you sure? [A pause. Leonardo hesitates to reply.] Why are you silent? Still pity!

Leonardo.

[In a low voice, looking anxiously at the first door to the left, as if he fears to see some one appear.] Alessandro . . . Alessandro is there. You will see him. Shall you tell him that you have spoken to me . . . that you have told me this?

Anna.

No, no. . . . Forgive me, Leonardo, forgive me! With you, too, with you, too, I ought to have been silent. Silence, how difficult silence is for those who have renounced life!

Leonardo.

I will see you again to-morrow; I will speak to you, to-morrow. . . . Promise me. . . . Shall I find you
here, to-morrow, at the same hour? Thanks, Anna.

[He kisses her hands.] Thanks; good-bye.

[He turns towards the second door to the right, is about to open it, but stops in the act, agitated by an insupportable tremor; goes to the first door, by which he came in, and disappears down the stairs like one in flight.

Anna.

[Listening, and going several paces towards the sound of flight.] Leonardo! He is going out ... Leonardo! Leonardo! [She stops, panting.] My God, my God, how he trembled before the door!

Scene III.

Bianca Maria comes in by that door, frightened.

Bianca Maria.

Did you call, Leonardo? What has happened? Where is Leonardo? Speak, Anna! Where is he?

Anna.

Do not be frightened. ... He was here, just now; he was here, he was talking with me, on the loggia. ... He went out, I don't know why. ... I don't
know where he has gone. . . . I called him back because I suddenly thought I would like to go out with him. . . . The night is fine. But he did not hear me.

**Bianca Maria.**

I was frightened.

**Anna.**

Do not be frightened, Bianca Maria.

**Bianca Maria.**

I was alone in the room with the treasures: I was arranging the jewels around Cassandra, so that when he came in he might find everything finished. . . . I was not at ease, certainly; I shivered a little from time to time. . . . If you could see those gold masks, at night, by lamplight. . . . They look strangely like life. . . . A sudden breath of wind blew out the lamp, and I found myself in darkness, and at that moment I heard your voice calling to Leonardo. . . .

I was frightened.

**Anna.**

Child!

**Bianca Maria.**

*[Throwing her arms about Anna, with a sudden movement.]* I am frightened; I have always some fear.
within me, Anna, I don't know what it is. I want to run away; I have a frantic desire of running away, I don't know where, I don't know where. . . . But tell me, Anna, tell me what I should do! Help me, you who are all goodness and all strength, you who can forgive and can defend. I put my soul in your hands, put my life in your hands, that are holy, that know the truth, that are bathed in my tears. . . . Tell me what I should do!

Anna.

[Caressing her gently.] Be calm, be calm. Have no fear. Fear nothing. No one will harm you, poor soul. I am here; I will save you. Have faith, have faith! Wait a little longer.

Bianca Maria.

[With increasing agitation.] Anna, Anna, I will not leave you any more, I will not let you go away from me any more! I will go away with you, go far away with you, be with you always, at your feet, be your faithful slave, watch over you as one watches over a holy image, pray for you, die for you, like the Nurse, like the Nurse. I have every devotion for you in my soul! No labour, no labour will be too hard for me if it soothes your pain. If I could ransom with all my
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blood these days of curse and anguish, if at the price of a dreadful suffering I could wipe out every trace of these things,—Anna, Anna, believe me!—I would not hesitate, I would not hesitate.

Anna.

Ah, dear, all your blood and all your tears could not revive a single smile! All the bounty of spring cannot give reflowering to a plant that is wounded at the root. Do not be distressed, then, Bianca Maria; do not sorrow for the things that are now accomplished, that are now a part of time. I have put my days and my dreams out of my soul: the days that are past, the dreams that are spent. I would that no one had pity on me, that no one tried to comfort me. I would find some quiet way for my uncertain feet, some place where sleep and sorrow are one, where there is neither noise nor wondering, nor any who watch or listen. And I would not speak any more, for in certain hours of life no one knows what words are better to say and what are better to keep unsaid. And I would, I would, Bianca Maria, that you had faith in me as in an elder sister, who went away quietly, because she had understood and pardoned everything. . . . Quietly . . . quietly . . . not far . . . not too far. . . . Come, come, you promised to
read to me (do you remember?) just now. Find the book. Let me sit down.

[Bianca Maria leads her to a seat, then kneels before her and takes her hands.]

Bianca Maria.

Listen, Anna, listen. Nothing is lost, nothing is irreparable. You could not utter more desperate words, and in a sweeter voice. Ah, do you think that I do not understand you? Well, no, no, nothing is lost; nothing irreparable has happened. . . . I don't know what sudden fear has thrown me into your arms; and I have cried to you to save me, to defend me . . . but against an unknown peril, against an obscure peril that hangs over me unseen, unrealisable. . . . I am weak; childish terror can still come over my mind of a sudden, and throw it into disorder. . . . Listen, Anna, to the truth. Who could lie to you? When you came in there, in the room where the gold is, and kissed me on the lips, you felt that my lips were pure. . . . They were pure, they are pure. By the memory of my mother, by the head of my brother, I swear to you, Anna, that they shall remain pure, so, sealed with your dear hands.

[She puts the blind woman's hands to her mouth.]
Do not swear, do not swear! You sin against life: it is as if you cut off all the roses from the earth, that they might not be given to one who desired them. What is the use? What is the use? Do you think you can cut off desire? I felt that your lips were pure, pure as fire; but, only a few minutes before, I had felt two lives reach out to one another with all their strength, and gaze fixedly through my motionless sorrow as through a crystal that was ready to break.

Bianca Maria.

My God! my God! You are like one who closes the doors all round.

Anna.

One remains open.

Bianca Maria.

[With a clear and firm accent.] I will go out by that one.

Anna.

It is yours, it is yours: it is the door of the future! Have faith! Wait a little longer!

[A pause. Bianca Maria bows her head under a gloomy thought.

Do you smell the scent of myrtles? It is intoxicating
as warm wine: it keeps all its heat in the freshness of the night wind. Do you smell it? To me too, once, it gave a dizziness. . . . It was in the time of the great joy: a long, long time ago. We went to Megara, along the Gulf of Ægina. You know that shore! Then it was white as salt, spotted with myrtles and little twisted pines that looked at themselves in the calm water. To my ecstatic eyes the myrtles seemed like fires that burned with a green flame; and the sea was immaculate, and new as a corolla that has scarcely opened. . . .

Bianca Maria.

[Slowly raising her head.] How your voice sounds, Anna! It is so sweet that it touches the depths of my soul like music. When you speak of beautiful things, there seems to come to your lips the echo of I know not what song. Still speak to me of beautiful things, Anna!

Anna.

Speak to me of your dream, Bianca Maria! For what country would you set out? For Syracuse? When we came here we thought of spending the spring at Zante. Alessandro wanted to take Leonardo to Zante, that he might rest there. I do not know the island; but one evening, on my first voyage,
I saw it in the distance, and it looked to me like the Isle of the Blessed. It was near Myrtia. Myrtia! sweet name. You ought to be called that. The sun was setting, I remember: all around, great hills of sacred aspect, covered with thick vines that had the level green look of a meadow, but with something passionate, for the ardour of the day had made the vine-leaves languid; and now and again, in the midst of the passionate vines, a pensive line of black cypresses. The round moon, faint as a breath on a glass, rose in the pallid sky, between the points of the black cypresses. Through the hollow of a valley rose in the distance the divine figure of Zante on the sea, as if cut out of a mass of sapphire by the most delicate of sculptors, on a rosy zone. I see it so still. We were to have passed the spring there. I think I should have found there your oranges that one can eat like bread.

... I am thirsty.

Bianca Maria.

Are you thirsty? What will you have to drink?

Anna.

Some water.

Bianca Maria.

[Rises, goes up to the table, and pours out a glass of water.] Here is water.
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Anna.

[After drinking.] It is almost warm. I have always imagined with longing the delight of drinking at a spring, flat on one's mouth, like the animals. One day I heard Alessandro drinking like that, in long draughts, and I envied him. One must lie down on the ground, must one not? and support oneself on one's hands? All the face is bathed, up to the forehead, is it not? I would like to try. Have you ever tried it?

Bianca Maria.

I always drink like that. It is indeed a delicious way of drinking. It seems as if the whole face drinks. The eyelashes palpitate on the water like drowning butterflies. I have the courage to keep my eyes open; and, as the water enters my throat, I see marvellous secrets in the depths. I cannot tell you what strange figures rise out of the arrangement of the pebbles.

Anna.

Your voice, now, is as fresh as a spring of water; I seem to hear the water on your body as on the statue of a fountain. [A pause.] Do you not think, Bianca Maria, that the statues in the fountains ought to be happy? In their motionless and enduring beauty circulates a living soul that is renewed continually.
They enjoy, at the same time, rest and fluidity. In lonely gardens they sometimes seem in exile, but they are not; for their liquid soul never ceases to communicate with the far-off mountains, whence they came while yet asleep, and shut up in the mass of lifeless mineral. They listen astonished to the words that come into their mouth from the depths of the earth, but they are not deaf to the colloquies of poets and sages who love to repose there, as in a retreat, in the musical shade where marble perpetuates a calm gesture. Do they not seem to you happy? I would like well enough to be one of them, for I too, like them, am blind.

**Bianca Maria.**

Oh, Anna, you too, like them, have the power of calming anguish and of granting forgetfulness! When you speak of beautiful things, he who hears you forgets his pain, and believes that he can still live, and that life can still be sweet.

**Anna.**

Life can still be sweet. Do not fear! All passes, all is nothing. . . . What is it that Cassandra says of human things? "If then they are adverse, a sponge filled with water wipes out all trace of them." Why do you not read a little? You promised to read to me.
What shall I read?

Anna.

That dialogue between Cassandra and the chorus of old men.

[Bianca Maria looks for the volume of Eschylus on the table, as if forced, against her will.]

Have you found the book?

Bianca Maria.

[Opening the book and turning over the pages.] Yes, here it is.

Anna.

Read a little.

Bianca Maria.

[Reading.] "Chorus. Well knew we of thy fame in prophesying,
But have no need of any prophet here.
"Cassandra. Ah me, alas! what doth she meditate?
What great new sorrow is this? She meditates
Herself a mighty evil in this house,
Intolerable to friends, irreparable;
And hope removes far off.
"Chorus. These prophesyings
I do not understand. . . ."
Anna.

[Interrupting.] No, enough. Do not read any more. It is too gloomy. Go on with the "Antigone," at the point where you left off the other morning. Do you remember? It was where Antigone laments for the first time over her sorrow. It is as if her voice grows golden like the top of a cypress at sunset.

[Bianca Maria looks for the volume of Sophocles.

Bianca Maria.

I cannot find the book.

Anna.

Have you not found it since then?

Bianca Maria.

Ah, here it is.

[Opens the book, finds the page, and reads.

"Chorus. Illustrious thou, and with praise,
Goest toward the secret places of the dead,
Not wasted with a sickness, finding not
The wages of the sword, but willingly,
Sole among mortals unto Hades living.

"Antigone. Yet I have heard of old
Of that sad ending of the Phrygian guest,
Tantalus' daughter, upon Sipyle,
How the stone sprouted to envelop her
Like tightening ivy; and the rains, men say,
Cease not about her wasting, nor the snows
Cease ever, but her weeping eyelids bathe
Her neck in tears. Me too, most like to her,
A god shall put to sleep. . . ."

Anna.

[Interrupting.] Ah, the statue of Niobe! Before
dying, Antigone sees a stone statue from which issues
a spring of eternal tears. . . . Enough, Bianca Maria!
Do not read any more. Death seems to be every-
where. Shut the book! Go out on the loggia and
look at the stars. I am tired, very tired; I would
that some deity bent over me too in sleep. [She rises
and calls.] Nurse! Nurse! [A pause. No one answers.]
Nurse! She does not hear. Perhaps she has gone
to sleep. She, too, is tired, poor old woman! I will
not awaken her. What is sweeter than sound sleep?
[A pause.] It is incredibly silent to-night. The wind
has fallen. Not a breath stirs. [She stretches out her
hands to the air.] Perhaps Alessandro, too, is asleep.
Do you think he is asleep? He has not come out of
his room. Not a sound has come from his room. He
has shut the door. [A pause.] What will you do
now?
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Bianca Maria.

[Vaguely frightened.] I will wait for my brother.

Anna.

Here alone?

Bianca Maria.

Here alone.

Anna.

Where can Leonardo be?

Bianca Maria.

[Starting.] Where can he be? Why does he not come back? [A pause.] I am frightened.

Anna.

Do not be frightened. The night is calm. He will come back soon.

Bianca Maria.

I will wait for him.

Anna.

Shall I stay with you?

Bianca Maria.

No, no. You are tired. I see by your face that you are too tired.
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**Anna.**

Will you lead me as far as the threshold, only as far as the threshold? I will not awaken the Nurse. I will find my room easily by myself.

[Bianca Maria takes her by the hand and leads her to the threshold.]

**Bianca Maria.**

But it is all dark.

**Anna.**

For me there is no difference. [She bends towards the shadow, by the door] Do you hear the Nurse's breathing? It is not quite quiet. It is a little choked. Perhaps she has gone to sleep in an uncomfortable position. Poor Nurse! Dear, dear old woman! [She still listens, then embraces Bianca Maria.] Thank you. Good-night. Let me kiss your two eyes. Good-night. Go, go in peace! Go out on the loggia and look at the stars.

[She disappears in the shadow. Bianca Maria follows her with her eyes for some seconds; then turns, with a frightened look, as if seized by an intolerable anguish. She takes several steps towards the loggia. At the foot of the steps she turns again with a look of fear,
watching the door. Then she goes up slowly; but, on the top step, hesitates, leans against the column, and remains thus for several instants looking out on the night. All at once she lets herself drop at the foot of the column, without sound, with the tacit lightness of a folding sail; and, doubled up upon herself, bursts into tears.

END OF THE THIRD ACT.
THE FOURTH ACT

The same room as that in which Act I. took place.
The loggia is open, in twilight.

SCENE I.

Leonardo appears on the loggia and looks over the
dead city, on which the shadows of evening are
falling. His aspect is that of a man who is in
the grip of an extreme resolution. His eyes burn
in his earthy pallor, as if inflamed with fever. He
speaks and moves convulsively, as in a kind of
lucid delirium.

Leonardo.

The tombs. . . . She might fall into one of the
tombs, the deepest tomb. . . . No, no. . . . If she
should live, if she should suffer! . . . Ah, horrible,
horrible!

[He clasps his forehead with his hands, in a
gesture of horror and madness. He comes down the steps into the room, moves uncertainly, wandering, staggering, obeying the fluctuations of his lethal idea. It is necessary, then; it is necessary. . . . It is necessary that she should be no more, that she should be no more! . . . Ah, if she could fly, if she could vanish away, if she were far away now, if her room were empty! . . . It will be empty, it must be empty, to-night. . . . Her breathing, her breathing. . . .

[He lets himself fall on a seat, passes his hands over his face as if to clear away a cloud, as if to see more clearly.]

There is no escape; there is no other escape. It is all thought out, is it not? It is all thought out. He loves her. . . . And the other woman is thinking of death. . . . And the indelible stain on my soul.

. . . All at once an abyss has opened. All is shattered, all is sundered, all at once, by her, by her! She is there, so sweet, so sweet; and through her all this evil. . . . No one can live any longer. No one knows any one else. There is an abyss between us who were but one life, but one soul! . . . There is no other escape; there is no other way. [A pause. He rises, pursued by his torment.] What shall I do? What shall I do? She will be here soon. . . . Ah, I shall
see her, I shall speak to her, I shall hear her voice.

... If I could but now, in this last hour, see the
sainted sister again! If, looking at her for the last
time, my eyes might become pure again! If for the
last time I might take her in my arms without that
tremor... that horrible tremor!... He loves her,
he loves her! For how long? How? What has
happened between them?... Ah, my God, my God,
everything is infected in me, everything is contami-
nated. ... And this thirst that devours me!

[He touches his burning throat. He looks at the
table to see if there is drinking water; goes
up to it, fills a glass, and drinks greedily.
He starts, as if struck by a sudden thought.

Ah, the spring!

[A pause. He trembles, leaning against the table,
under the shock of that new thought, his eyes
wide open and staring.

[Bianca Maria comes in by the second door to
the right. Her aspect reveals a dull and
helpless weariness.

Bianca Maria.

Are you here, Leonardo? I did not know that
you had come back.
LEONARDO.

[Restraining his agitation.] Yes, I came back a little while ago. . . . I was going to look for you; but I thought . . . that you were asleep. . . . Have you been asleep?

BIANCA MARIA.

No, I could not sleep.

LEONARDO.

You must be very tired.

BIANCA MARIA.

And you?

LEONARDO.

Oh, I am accustomed to it. But you! To wait for me till dawn, there, sitting on the steps! Why did you do that? When I came in, when I saw you, you had a poor white face. . . .

[In his voice quivers an unexpected tenderness.]

BIANCA MARIA.

You cried out!

LEONARDO.

I did not expect to find you there, and you rose up suddenly like a ghost.
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BIANCA MARIA.
I am always like a ghost for you. You are afraid of me.

LEONARDO.
[Taken aback.] No, no... .

BIANCA MARIA.
[Taking his hand.] Why did you fly from me last night? I know that you fled...

LEONARDO.
Fled?

BIANCA MARIA.
Anna called you back; and her voice was changed.

LEONARDO.
Called me back? I did not hear.

BIANCA MARIA.
And you stayed out all night, till dawn!

LEONARDO.
The night was so beautiful; and the hours passed swiftly on the way. Night, in the solstice, is brief. And I wanted to hear the nightingales singing at
dawn. . . . But if I could have thought that you would wait for me. . . .

**Bianca Maria.**

I waited for you, weeping.

**Leonardo.**

Weeping?

**Bianca Maria.**

*[No longer able to restrain herself.]* Yes, yes, weeping all my tears, for you, for you. . . . Do you think I could live another day like this? Do you think it would be possible to endure this torture any longer? Tell me at least, you, what I ought to do! Take me away, take me away; or let us be alone here. . . . I am ready to obey you in everything. I want to be alone with you, as we were once, here or anywhere. I will follow you anywhere, without a murmur. But quickly! But quickly! To-morrow! If you will not, if you delay, yours will be the fault, whatever may happen . . . yours will be the fault, Leonardo. Think of it.

**Leonardo.**

*[Looking her in the face, dead white, with choking voice.]* You love him, then? Speak, speak; how much do you love him? To distraction?
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Bianca Maria.

[Covering her face.] Oh! oh!

Leonardo.

[Half demented.] And he ... has he told you that he loves you? When? when did he tell you? Answer. Do you think he loves you beyond avail?

Bianca Maria.

[Still holding her face between her hands.] Oh! oh! What you ask me!

[Leonardo is again about to speak, but refrains. He walks away a few steps irresolutely, looks at the door; looks at the loggia. He turns towards his sister.]

Leonardo.

Forgive me. I have nothing to say against you. I find no fault in you. A hard destiny is over us, and we must suffer its iron law. I find no fault in you. You are pure, are you not, sister? And you shall remain pure; you shall know no shame.

Bianca Maria.

[Taking courage, and throwing her arms about his neck.] Yes, yes, brother. Tell me what we shall do.
I vowed myself yours when we were left alone in the world; I will live for you only in the future. Tell me what we shall do! I am ready.

Leonardo.

I will tell you . . . but not here. . . . Shall we go out? Shall we go and sit down . . . by the Fountain of Perseia?

Bianca Maria.

Let us go. . . . But the odour of the myrtles is so strong there that it made me ill yesterday.

Leonardo.

To-night it will not be too strong, for there is a wind stirring that will scatter it.

Bianca Maria.

Let us go.

[Leonardo seems as if he cannot move, motionless in his excess of anguish. He looks desperately around on everything, as if he himself were seeing it for the last time.

Leonardo.

Do you not need . . . to get anything . . . from your room? Will you not cover your head?
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BIANCA MARIA.

No; the night is calm. It is lightening towards the gulf.

LEONARDO.

[Irresolute.] Perhaps . . . it will rain.

BIANCA MARIA.

Would to God it may! But there was not a cloud in the sky.

LEONARDO.

And then, to-day, was there not a procession from Fichtia to the chapel of the prophet Elijah?

BIANCA MARIA.

I heard the singing in the distance. Why do you look at me like that?

LEONARDO.

[Starting.] I am looking at your tired eyes. . . . They pain me. . . . Are you sleepy?

BIANCA MARIA.

No, I am not sleepy now. . . . I will sleep by-and-by, when all is settled. . . . Let us go. You must tell me. . . . But what are you thinking of?
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LEONARDO.

What am I thinking of? Oh, a strange memory. . . .

BIANCA MARIA.

What memory?

LEONARDO.

Oh, nothing . . . a trivial thing. . . . I was thinking of that snake's slough that we found by the way as we went up to Mycenae for the first time. . . . Oh, a trivial thing. . . . I don't know why it came into my mind. . . .

BIANCA MARIA.

I keep it, do you know? I put it between the pages of a book, as a mark.

LEONARDO.

Ah, you keep it! . . . [Comes nearer to his sister, and lowers his voice.] Tell me, tell me, when did you see Anna?

BIANCA MARIA.

Some hours ago.

LEONARDO.

Is she there, in her room?
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BIANCA MARIA.

I believe she is there.

LEONARDO.

She has not spoken to you . . . she has not ever spoken to you of these things?

BIANCA MARIA.

[Letting her head fall sorrowfully.] Yes, yes. . . . She knows; she suffers. . . .

LEONARDO.

How? How has she spoken to you?

BIANCA MARIA.

Like a sister, with the goodness of a sister. . . .

LEONARDO.

She has forgiven you? Kissed you?

BIANCA MARIA.

Yes. . . .

LEONARDO.

[Trembling, hesitating.] And he . . . have you seen him . . . since last night?
Bianca Maria.

No. . . . He is not here.

Leonardo.

Did Anna tell you . . . where he has gone?

Bianca Maria.

To Nauplia.

Leonardo.

When will he be back?

Bianca Maria.

To-night, perhaps; soon. [A pause.] But what are you looking at behind me?

[She turns, frightened, as if to see some one behind her.

Leonardo.

Nothing, nothing. . . . I thought some one was coming in by that door.

[He points to the door leading to Anna's room. Bianca Maria listens.

Bianca Maria.

Perhaps it is Anna coming. . . . Let us go.

[She takes her brother by the hand and draws him towards the door on the stairs.
LEONARDO.

Is Anna coming?

[He follows his sister, turning his head, and looking at the second door to the left, which opens.]

SCENE II.

Anna appears on the threshold, followed by The Nurse.

Anna.

Who is going out by the door on the stairs?

[Leonardo and Bianca Maria go out without answering.]

Who is it, Nurse?

The Nurse.

The brother and sister.

Anna.

Ah, they are going downstairs. . . . Where are they going?

[As she moves towards the door on the stairs The Nurse accompanies her. On the threshold she leans forward and calls.]

Bianca Maria! Leonardo! Where are you going?
[No reply.] Bianca Maria, where are you going? Where are you going? [No reply.] Nurse, run after them, overtake them.

[The Nurse goes out. The blind woman, agitated by a confused anxiety, remains listening by the door.

Where are they going? They did not answer. Yet they must have heard my voice; they had only just gone out. . . . It is as if they were in flight. . . . Where? . . . How my heart beats!

[She puts her hand on her heart. She listens to hear if The Nurse is coming back.

He is to speak to me to-night, at the same hour. . . . What will he say? What can he say? . . . It seems as if some great thing has been decided.

[She hears the footsteps of The Nurse on the stairs.

Nurse, are you alone?

The Nurse.

[Entering, out of breath.] I came up with them. . . . They told me they were going to the spring . . . they will be back soon.

Anna.

Did they not hear me calling to them?
They were walking fast, as if they were in a hurry.

Is it late? Is it evening yet?

One can hardly see here. There is a warm wind which raises the dust. It is lightening towards the sea.

Is the storm coming?

The sky is cloudless. It is lightening in the clear sky.

When is Alessandro coming back?

It is time now.

Let us wait for him.

[The Nurse helps her to sit down, and sits beside her on a low stool. Both remain silent; there is a long pause. Anna listens attentively and vibrates at the slightest sound.]
Do you hear? Do you hear, Nurse? What is that playing? It is like a flute.

The Nurse.
It is a shepherd going by.

Anna.
How sweetly he plays! It is like a flute.

The Nurse.
It is a reed-flute.

[The blind woman listens for some instants.

Anna.
It is an old tune that I seem to have heard, I know not when.

The Nurse.
He has passed here before, several times, that shepherd.

Anna.
No. I seem to have heard it in a time that I no longer remember. . . . It is as if you were telling me one of your old fairy tales, Nurse. How many things, how many things, in the sound of a little reed! My heart is full, Nurse, heavy as a millstone. Do you think they would have met the shepherd? Bianca Maria and her brother, I mean.
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The Nurse.
Perhaps.

Anna.
[Anxiously.] How did they look? Did you look at them well? Look them in the face? How did they look?

The Nurse.
I hardly know. . . . How should they look?

Anna.
Were they troubled? Were they sad?

The Nurse.
They seemed to be in a hurry.

Anna.
But he, the brother. . . . did you not look him in the face?

The Nurse.
They were not near me. They went on walking.

Anna.
Which of them went first?

The Nurse.
They were, I think, hand in hand.
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Anna.

Ah, they were hand in hand. ... And they walked with a firm step?

The Nurse.

They were walking fast.

[A pause. Anna is pensive and watchful.

Anna.

And Alessandro doesn't come!

The Nurse.

It is time now. He must be nearly here.

Anna.

[Rising impatiently.] Go out on the loggia, Nurse and look out for him.

[The Nurse goes out on the loggia to watch.

The Nurse.

What a hot wind! It is as if it came from a furnace. ... I think I see a man on horseback, on the road.

Anna.

[With a start.] Is it Alessandro?
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The Nurse.

Yes, yes, it is the master. Here he is.

[She comes down the steps.

Anna.

Go, Nurse. See that everything is ready in his room. Do not come unless I call you. Is there still a little light here?

The Nurse.

One can hardly see at all.

Anna.

Bring a lamp.

[The Nurse goes out to the left. Anna listens anxiously to hear the footsteps of Alessandro on the stairs.

Scene III.

Alessandro enters. He is so absorbed in sorrowful thoughts that he does not notice the presence of Anna. He walks silently towards his room.

Anna.

Alessandro!
Alessandro.

[Starting and stopping.] Are you there, Anna? I did not see you. It is almost dark.

Anna.

I was waiting for you.

Alessandro.

I was delayed a little. The wind raised such a dense cloud of dust on the road that it was difficult to push forward. It is the breath of the desert. The night seems to come down like a burning cinder. . . . Where is Leonardo?

Anna.

He went out, a little while ago, with his sister.

Alessandro.

[In an uncertain voice.] Do you know where he was going?

Anna.

He went down to the Fountain of Perseia.

The Nurse enters carrying the lighted lamp, but as she puts it down on the table, a gust of wind extinguishes it. The door behind her shuts violently.
Ah, it has gone out. I must close the door on the stairs. The wind is rising.

[She goes and closes the door; then returns to the table and re-lights the lamp. The face of Anna expresses a vague terror. She listens towards the open loggia, as if expecting to hear distant cries. The Nurse goes out to the left, closing the door behind her.

Anna.

Alessandro, come closer to me; listen. [Alessandro comes closer, anxiously.] Do you not hear? Do you not seem to hear? . . .

Alessandro.

What? [Anna does not answer.] It is the wind whistling in the holes of the walls, and under the Gate of the Lions.

Anna.

Is the storm rising?

Alessandro.

[Going up hastily to the loggia.] No. The sky is quite clear. The stars are beginning to come out. The sickle of the moon is on the top of the Acropolis. The wind makes a curious noise in the dead city: perhaps sucked
down into the mouths of the tombs. It is like the roll of drums. Do you not hear it?

[He comes down the steps. Anna seizes his arm, in prey to an anxiety which she cannot repress.

What is the matter, Anna?

Anna.

I am restless. . . . I cannot overcome the anxiety that clutches at my heart. . . . I am thinking of those two, out yonder. . . .

Alessandro.


Anna.

[At a loss.] But what do you mean? What do you think? No, no; he has said nothing, he has told me nothing . . . I—I spoke to him, last night, here: I who knew, who knew already . . . oh, but without complaint, without unkindness, Alessandro. . . .

'Alessandro.'

You spoke to him then, of that horrible thing: you can speak to him then, Anna? But how? How
did you know, tell me, how did you know? How could you discover this secret, when I myself, up to yesterday, had not the shadow of a suspicion? Tell me, how?

Anna.

[More at a loss than ever.] His secret! What do you mean? What secret? What horrible thing do you mean, Alessandro?

Alessandro.

[Taken aback, realising his mistake.] I meant...

Anna.

There is something else? There is something else?

Alessandro.

[Taking her hands, repressing with force the emotion that chokes him.] Listen to me, Anna, you who know how to bear whatever weight of sorrow, you who have never feared to suffer, and who know all the sadness of life. We are at a serious, a very serious moment. A violent whirlwind hurries us towards I know not what end. We are the prey of an obscure and invincible force. You know, Anna, you know that a dreadful knot has tightened about us, and that it must be cut. We have avoided speaking,
up to this moment, because to me as to you every word has seemed useless, and silence has seemed the only way of accepting necessity worthy of us and of what we were. Now everything hastens forward. The moment has come for each of us to look Destiny in the face. . . . It is no use shutting our eyes. All that is, is necessary. I ask you, therefore, Anna, for the truth. What happened yesterday night? I ask you for the truth.

Anna.

The truth. . . . Ah, it is no use, no use! In certain hours of life no one knows what words are better to say, what to keep down. . . . Yesterday I asked Leonardo to forgive me for speaking; and so I ask you to forgive me, Alessandro. You have said well, you have said well: only silence is worthy of us. We should not break silence, even to save some one. But he was there. . . . So often, so often I have felt him suffer, suffer cruelly. . . . It seemed to me that I alone was the cause of all the anguish, I alone: the obstacle! And I had a fraternal desire to console him, to do him some good, to show him that all was understood, and also settled. . . . And yesterday night I know not what abandonment there was in him when he came near me: I know not what need of confi-
dence. . . . It seemed to me that he had wept, that something had been loosened in his heart. . . . The stars seemed beautiful to him. . . . Then I felt the need of doing him some good; and I spoke. . . . I spoke of that poor creature and of you. . . . I wanted to chase out of his mind every bitterness, every unjust unkindness towards that dear creature whose only fault is to love and to be loved. . . . And I spoke to him of her, and I spoke to him of you, without complaining, without humbling myself, but giving him some hope. . . .

Alessandro.

[Convulsively.] Some hope! And he . . . do you think that he knew? Did it seem to you, Anna, that he knew already? . . . It is not possible! It is not possible! Only a little while before he had spoken to me. . . .

Anna.

[At a loss.] Did not know? Did not know?

[It seems as if, thinking over her conversation, she discovers some clue that she had not discovered before, and that her mind suddenly lights up. Her exclamation is like a repressed cry.]

Ah, perhaps! . . . He said he did not understand. . . . Yes, yes. . . . He said: "Are you sure? Are
you sure?" And then. . . . Ah, but then? But there is something else then, there is something else.

[Alessandro moves about the room uncertainly, like one who seeks some means of escape and does not find it.]

**Alessandro.**

[In a low voice, speaking to himself.] After what he had told me! . . .

**Anna.**

Tell me the truth then, you, Alessandro! I ask you for the truth.

**Alessandro.**

[Returning to her side.] And what did he do? Afterwards, what did he do? Where did he go?

**Anna.**

He went out, fled. . . . I know from his sister that he came back this morning at dawn. . . . She waited for him till dawn.

**Alessandro.**

Fled, fled! . . . It seems as if there is nothing to do but fly. . . .

[He moves uncertainly, not able to make up his mind.

Ah, when we shall look one another in the eyes again . . .
[Following him.] But now tell me truth, you!

**Alessandro.**

And they went out together. . . . They went down to the spring. . . . How long ago?

**Anna.**

A few minutes before you came back.

**Alessandro.**

Together . . . together . . . there . . . [His agitation increases from moment to moment.] And they were here with you, before they went out? And what did they say?

**Anna.**

No, I came in while they were going down the stairs . . . I called them, but they did not answer. . . . I sent the Nurse after them . . .

**Alessandro.**

Well?

**Anna.**

They said that they were going down to the spring for a little while, and would be back soon. . . . But tell me, tell me!

[She clutches hold of Alessandro's arm, as he is
about to go up to the loggia. They go out on it together, and disappear into the shadow, towards the balustrade. After a few instants, Alessandro comes back into the room alone. Obeying an instinctive impulse, he runs to the door, opens it, and descends the stairs precipitately. The blind woman appears between the columns, overcome with terror, trying to follow her husband.

Alessandro! Alessandro!

[No reply. She gropes about her, and finds one of the columns; sustaining herself against it, she descends the first step, then the others.

Alessandro! . . . He is not there . . . I am alone.

. . . O Lord, give me light!

[Following the warm current of wind that enters by the wide-open door, she goes towards the threshold; guiding herself by the frame of the door, she takes a step towards the stairs; then disappears into the shadow.

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.
THE FIFTH ACT

A solitary and savage place, near an excavation that goes deep between the lower spur of Mount Eubœa and the inaccessible side of the citadel. The myrtles flourish amongst the sharp stones and cyclopean ruins. The water of the Fountain of Perseia, rising between the rocks, falls into a cavity like a shell; from whence it flows out and is lost in the stony depths. In the ancient solitude, now filled with the mystery of night, is heard the gurgling of the perennial spring.

SCENE I.

Near the margin of the spring, at the foot of a myrtle bush, is stretched the corpse of Bianca Maria, at full length, rigid, white. The wet clothes cling to the body; the hair, heavy with water, envelops the face like large fillets; the arms are stretched along
the body; the feet are set together like those of sepulchral statues lying on a sarcophagus. Alessandro, seated on a stone, with his elbows on his knees and his forehead clasped in his hands, gazes fixedly at the corpse, silently, in a frightful immobility. On the other side stands Leonardo, leaning against a great block of stone, which his fingers clutch from time to time, convulsive and desperate as the fingers of a shipwrecked man clinging to a spar. In the mortal silence is heard the sound of water, and the intermittent breath of the wind on the bending myrtles. Suddenly Leonardo lets go the block of stone and kneels down beside the corpse of his sister, stooping as if to touch it.

Alessandro.

Stopping him with a quick gesture and an imperious cry.] Do not touch her! Do not touch her!

Leonardo.

[Drawing himself back, without rising.] No, no, I am not touching her. . . . She is yours, she is yours. . . .

[A pause. He gazes at the corpse with a superhuman intensity of love and sorrow. He seems to be seized with delirium. His voice
is at times hoarse and piercing, hardly recognisable.

Do you think, do you think . . . that I should profane her if I touched her? . . . No, no. . . . Now I am pure, I am quite pure. . . . If she were to rise up now, she could walk over my soul as over immaculate snow. . . . If she were to return to life again, all my thoughts for her would be like lilies, like lilies. . . . Ah, who shall say, on this earth, that he has loved a human being as I love this one? Not even you, not even you love her as I love her! There is no love equal to mine upon the earth. . . . All my soul is a heaven for this dead woman. . . .

[His voice rises, impetuous and ardent, like an increasing delirium; or deepens with a tremor of supreme tenderness.

Who, who would have done for her what I have done for her? Would you have had the courage to achieve this atrocious thing to save her soul from the horror that was about to seize upon it? Ah, you have loved her, you have loved her with all the force of your life, because she was made to be loved, but you do not know the soul that she had. . . . All the goodness of the earth and all the beauty—the beauty that even you have not yet dreamed of!—were in her soul.

It seemed as if, when she awoke every morning
all the breath of the spring passed over her soul and melted it and touched it into flower. It seemed as if every evening the sweetest things of our day had remained over in her mind as in a sieve, and that she mingled them for me, to give them to me as one gives a piece of bread. . . . Ah, so, so, for so long she nourished me; with this bread she nourished me, at the end of every one of my days! . . . She knew how to change the faintest smile into a great felicity. . . . The smallest of my joys widened in her soul to infinity, to infinity, like a circle in calm water, until it gave me the illusion of a great felicity. . . . Ah, you do not know, you do not know the soul she had. . . . No creature could be her equal upon the earth. . . . There was not one bitter drop in her blood. . . . Only a little while ago . . .

[He interrupts himself, starting like a sick man whose flesh writhes in an intolerable spasm.

only a little while ago . . . all her tender life trembled in her hair, under my hands.

[He trembles, on the ground, so horribly, that Alessandro rises, tries to go towards him, but cannot move, and falls back again upon the stone.

Ah, when she leaned over the water to drink. . . . I heard the first draught running down her throat
... it seemed to me that she drank my heart, that into that draught there passed all the sorrow I had suffered, all my shameful existence, and all consciousness, and all memory, and my whole being. ... Void, void, and blind was I when I fell upon her. ... Death was at my shoulders and pressed me with its iron knees. ... The world was destroyed. ... A thousand ages ... a minute ... and I was there on the stones ... and I was there with shivers, her hair ... her hair about her prone head. ... Ah, who would have done for her what I have done for her? ... I raised her, I saw her face again ... "All her face throbbed in the midst of her hair like a violent pulse," so, so Anna said yesterday; she had held it in her hands, she had felt it palpitating in her hands. ... And I saw her face again, not throbbing any more, her cold dripping face. ... I covered her eyelids upon her eyes ... ah, softer than a flower on a flower. ... And every stain is gone out of my soul; I have become pure, quite pure. All the sanctity of my first love has returned to my mind like a torrent of light. ... One good thing more from her, one good thing more from her, beyond death! ... To be able to love her so, I have killed her; that you might love her so under my eyes, you no more separated from me, you without more
cruelty and without more remorse, for this, for this, I have killed her. O brother, O my brother in life and death, reunited to me, for ever reunited to me by this sacrifice that I have made. . . . Look at her, look at her! She is perfect; now she is perfect. Now she can be adored like a divine being. . . . In the deepest of my sepulchres I will lay her at rest and I will set about her all my treasures. . . . Yours, yours all that shines, always yours all that is pure. . . . Beloved! beloved! If we could re-quicken with all our blood your pallid face, for one instant, that for one instant you might open your eyes, that you might see us, that you might hear the cry of our love and of our sorrow.

. . . Sister! Sister!

[He bends over the dead woman, calling her with a repeated and agonising cry, stretching his quivering hands towards the pallid face that remains motionless between the wet fillets of hair. No longer able to resist that cry, Alessandro rises, passes around the feet of the corpse, goes up to his friend, stoops down and puts one hand on his forehead to feel his fever, to calm a delirium that seems like the beginning of madness. Leonardo feels some relief at the contact. The horrible contraction of his nerves relaxes a little; his voice dies down.

*
Let me kiss her feet, her little feet.

[He drags himself to the feet of the dead woman and bows his forehead over them, remaining for some time in that position. Alessandro too bows down beside him. In the pause the sobbing of the spring is heard. Leonardo raises his head and remains with his eyes fixed on the inert feet.

One day she was by the sea, sitting on the sand, with her knees under her chin; and, dreaming her most beautiful dreams, she enveloped her feet in her loosened hair, her feet flexible as two leaves. The sea slept beside her, like an innocent child, breathing lightly.

[A pause. He trembles, assailed by another memory.

Ah, that accursed day, before the fire.

[He covers his face with his hands, and bows again to the earth.

Pardon! Pardon!

[A pause. Alessandro turns anxiously towards the rocks at the back, where the path opens.

Alessandro.

[Rising suddenly to his feet.] A footstep! I seem to hear a footstep, there, on the path. Listen.
[Leonardo also rises to his feet, terrified. Both listen, holding their breath.
No. Perhaps I was mistaken. . . . Perhaps it is the wind among the myrtles. . . . Perhaps a stone rolled down into the valley.

Leonardo.

I do not know. . . . My heart beats too loud; it deafens my ears. . . . I hear nothing else.

[Alessandro goes towards the rocks at the back and looks out. He hears nothing but the hoarse moaning of the spring.

Alessandro.

[Turning towards his friend, who gazes fixedly at the corpse, and shaking him.] What shall we do now? We must take her away from here. . . . Where shall we take her? Take her to the house, now? And Anna . . . and Anna? . . . What shall we tell her?

Leonardo.

[Confused, looking about him.] Anna . . . Anna. . . . She is expecting me at this very moment. . . . She promised me . . . promised . . . last night. . . .

Alessandro.

What did she promise you?
Leonardo.
To wait for me, to wait for me. . . .

Alessandro.
To wait for you? Where? Why?

Leonardo.
She thought. . . . She wanted . . .

Alessandro.
She wanted? . . .

Leonardo.
She wanted to go away . . . to go away. . . .

Alessandro.
Ah!
[A pause. Both instinctively look towards the path between the rocks, at the back. The spring is heard moaning.
What shall we tell her? What shall we do now? Will you stay here? . . . I will go . . . go and fetch . . . the shroud. . . .

Leonardo.
[Struck with an invincible terror.] No, no, don't go, don't leave me. . . Stay here, stay here still!
THE DEAD CITY

Alessandro.

But Anna... Anna... [He starts and listens.]
Some one is coming, some one is coming near. ... A footstep! I heard a footstep! Ah, if it were... We must hide her... Let us carry her over there, among the myrtles, in the bushes... Leonardo, do you not hear me?

[He shakes Leonardo, who seems turned to stone.
Let us carry her over there, among the myrtles... I will take her shoulders... Gently! Gently!

[He stoops to raise up the dead body at the head, while Leonardo bends to take it up by the feet. At that moment the voice of the blind woman is heard from the path.

Anna.

[From between the rocks at the back, invisible.]
Bianca Maria! Bianca Maria!

[Both loosen hold of the corpse, and rise, pallid with the pallor of the dead, rigid with terror, unable to move.
Bianca Maria!

[The blind woman appears between the rocks, alone, staggering, in the shadow. As no one answers, she makes some steps forward, desperate with anxiety.
Alessandro! Leonardo!

[She advances towards the corpse, almost touches it with her feet, while the two men remain unable to make a movement, to utter a word.

ALESSANDRO.

[At the instant when Anna's feet are about to touch the corpse.] Stop! Stop, Anna!

[But Anna has felt the inert body that lies at her feet. She stoops over the dead woman, distractedly, feeling over her, until she comes to the face, to the hair still heavy with the lethal water. She shivers through every fibre, at the chill that is like no other chill. She utters a piercing shriek, in which all her soul seems to find voice.

Anna.

Ah! ... I see! I see!

THE END.
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